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APRIL 1940

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 70 No. 6



The little gunner wedged the battle-standard in a gash in the deck. "Take a good look at that, yer blinkin' 'Uns!" he called. He shook a fist toward the sea. "An' now let's see 'ow yer can fight!" (Drawn by Frederic Anderson to illustrate "Carry On," the story of a 1940 Q-boat, by Borden Chase. . . . See Page 4.)

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BLUE BOOK



APRIL 1940

MAGAZINE

VOL. 70, NO. 6

A Complete Book-Length Novel

Murder in E-Flat Major By Fulton Grant 123
Illustrated by Percy Leason

Seven Short Stories

Carry On! By Borden Chase 4
Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

Warlock Finn By H. Bedford-Jones 32
Illustrated by Grattan Condon

Orient Express By William Makin 46
Illustrated by Charles Chickering

War Lord of Smoky Butte By Bigelow Neal 82
Illustrated by Walter Wikwerding

The World Was Their Stage By H. Bedford-Jones 90
Illustrated by Clinton Shepherd and John R. Flanagan

Monkey Money By Kenneth Perkins 104
Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Junior G-Man By Robert Mill 114
Illustrated by Charles Chickering

A Novelette

Tarzan and the Champion By Edgar Rice Burroughs 16
Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

A Serial Novel

Lady of the Legion By Georges Surdez 60
Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

Real Experiences

Night Horse By Will James 182
A famous writer tells of his cowboy days—and illustrates his own story.

When the Courageous Sank By John E. Burns 188
An American sailor shares the aftermath of a great tragedy.

Mirriri By Donald Thomson 190
Weird scenes in Australia, described by a distinguished anthropologist.

Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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UNDoubtedly there was a war going on along the Western Front; but so far, the English and French had managed to keep it a secret. True, it was their show. I had no desire to tell them how to run it. But it did seem a waste of talent to keep two dozen American newspaper-men bottled up in London when they might have been scampering around behind the lines, grabbing stories and turning them into hot reading for the American public.

The cables that came through from the home offices didn't help. The editors wanted news—real news. They didn't want official *communiqués* from the War Office. But there wasn't any news in London. There wasn't anything to see in London. And at Blackout time, there wasn't anything to do in London except to gather around a table in the News Club with a few other correspondents and play poker.

My poker wasn't the brand that could stand a long siege. If I wanted to eat, I had to pass up the games. That was why I was standing in a Limehouse pub when Sub-Lieutenant Bryan, R.N.R., arrived to set up drinks for the house. He was one of those pink-and-white little fellows that grow nowhere but in England. He belonged on the Strand, or in Piccadilly. Not in Limehouse. Neither did I, for that matter. But a quiet civilian could stand at the bar without attracting much notice from the crowd of merchant seamen who gathered in the Gold Anchor.

Sub-Lieutenant Bryan drew stares. He had closed the outer door of the light-trap—one of those ingenious affairs built like a vestibule to keep any light from leaking into the dark street; and he was standing framed in the inner doorway. I saw the flash of his buttons first; then I noticed his left arm was in a blue silk sling. He tried to cover a limp when he walked toward the bar, and his light gray-eyes were very serious.

"Whut'll it be, sir?" asked the barmaid. She was blonde and round.

"I should like," said Sub-Lieutenant Bryan, "to set up a round of drinks for the gentlemen."

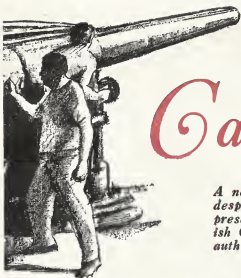
He tossed a pound note onto the bar, and smiled at the girl. It was a nice smile, a kid's smile—one of those bashful grins that are gone of an instant. But Sub-Lieutenant Bryan was nervous. He stroked the dozen or more blond hairs that were camouflaging his upper lip, and he tried to look at ease. It didn't work. He didn't belong in this pub, and the ragged collection that lined the bar knew it.

"'Ow's that?" inquired a bull-necked sailor with blue tattoo-marks on his knuckles. "'Ow's that, I arks? Ye're goin' to buy a drink, whut?"

"I am," said Sub-Lieutenant Bryan. The sailor turned to his friend of the moment. "You 'ear that, Nipper? The adm'ral's goin' to buy a drink."

"'Old yer jaw," said Nipper. "Can't yer see 'is wing's been clipped?"

It was a reprimand. The bull-necked sailor looked at the arm in the blue silk



Carry On!

A not-soon-forgotten story of desperate hazard aboard the present-war version of a British Q-boat . . . by the able author of "Submarine Sunk!"

By **BORDEN CHASE**

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

slung. He nodded solemnly. Others who had started to add their comments crowded along the bar and stared at the young naval officer. None came too close. I looked at the nervous hand that stroked the blond mustache. That was habit: I've always been able to tell more about a man by his hands than by his face. A face can lie; a hand tells the truth. And I'd seen this hand before. Right at this same bar, not more than a month ago. It was dirty the last time. And the man who owned it hadn't been wearing the neat blue coat of a naval officer.

"On the young gentlemun, sir," said the barmaid.

SHE filled my glass, and I lifted it, swatching the pink-and-white officer as he turned to face the crowd. His teeth were worrying his lower lip, and he was seemingly having difficulty with his voice: It was high, almost like a girl's.

"We'll drink, gentlemen," he said, "to Willie Tinkham and Howard Knowles, if you please—two British seamen who have done their duty."

"Lor' lumme!" said the bull-necked man. "He means Wullie an' 'Owie of Rotherhithe!"

"He must 'a' been with 'em!" said another.

"Bottoms up!" cried the bull-necked man.

They drank to Willie Tinkham and Howard Knowles, two British seamen who had done their duty. I drank with them. Then our young Sub-Lieutenant

Bryan solemnly broke his glass, and the others did likewise.

"I'll pay for the glasses, of course," he said to the barmaid.

"Not likely," she answered. "Them's on the 'ouse, sir."

It was all over, and the young officer started toward the light-trap, walking briskly and with a bit of a swagger in spite of his limp. I followed, and fell in-to step with him on the dark street.

"I was in that pub," I said, "when you made your last stop."

"Really?" he said. He didn't slacken his pace.

"Have you time for another drink at the News Club?"

"You're a writer?"

"Yes."

"Can't talk for publication, you know."

"Of course."

We walked for a time in the darkness. Things happen like that in London during a war. Things that couldn't happen in peace-time. I told him my name, and learned his family were in Stockton. He hoped to get north to see them, but as yet he hadn't been given permission. This evening he had planned to take in a cinema, but he didn't feel quite up to it now. Again I suggested a drink at the News Club. He was doubtful. Casually, I told him I had served on the American destroyers during the last mess. That did the trick. Sub-Lieutenant Bryan had heard about the destroyers, and wanted to hear more.

We headed toward the News Club.



"We'll drink, gentlemen," said the officer, "to Willie Tinkham and Howard Knowles—two British seamen who have done their duty."

"Strange that you should have recognized me," he said over a whisky and soda. "Hope you won't spread it about. I was supposed to be in disguise last time. Went to no end of trouble. Patch on my cheek and all that."

"It was your hands," I said. "That, and the way you lifted your glass."

"Stupid of me," said Sub-Lieutenant Bryan. "Must remember in future."

I offered a pack of American cigarettes. They were scarce in London. "Adding it up," I said, "I can guess the answer. Most of it, at least. But I wish you'd fill in the middle."

"You won't write it—word of honor?"

"Not until I have your permission, and that of the Admiralty."

He grinned that kid's smile of his. "Suppose you tell me what you know. Then we'll see."

That was fair enough. I finished my drink, ordered two more and tried to recall the night I had been standing at the bar of that same Limehouse pub.



THE war was new, then. It was being fought over mugs of porter and ale by hard-faced men who worked along the waterfront.

There were a dozen or so in the smoke-filled room when the door opened and a group of British seamen came to the bar. They were a ragged crowd. Some were in dirty blue pea-coats, others in sweaters and dungarees; all of them had been drinking, and their voices were loud.

"'Ere, now," said one,—a lumbering fellow with hands that could span a beer-keg,—“let's 'ave a drink as *is* a drink! Somefin' to keep the fog out of a honest seaman's throat. We sail at midnight, so we do. Carryin' good British beef to the men in the lines. Let's 'ave a drink as *is* a drink!”

“'Ush up!” said another. “Do yer want the 'ole German Naivy waitin' on us in the Channel? Stow yer gab, man!”

“The German Naivy!” said the lumbering one. “Bring 'em on, says I—bring 'em on—all o' them! The good ol' *India Maid* 'll give 'em the slip, so she will!”

It was dangerous talk. I was a neutral with little or no interest in the doings of the British merchant service. But I wasn't the only man in that pub. Others were there, and their ears were sharp. Within an hour one of these listening dock-workers might slip cautiously into an unlighted house, shed his Cockney dialect and pass the word that a freighter was sailing at midnight. A hidden wireless might send this message along to a waiting submarine, and the *India Maid*

would join the other British freighters at the bottom.

Still the seamen talked. They drank and laughed and boasted no German sub would ever catch them. An hour passed, and the door opened to admit a pair of merchant officers. One was tall, gaunt and slow in his movements. He looked about the dimly lit pub, grunted and walked to the bar. Beside him came a younger man, sloppy in his bearing, with a small face that looked out from under a dirty cap. He was wearing a leather jacket over a roll-neck gray sweater. A wide strip of adhesive tape was stretched across one round cheek.

"Nah, then," said the older man. "Whut's goin' on, eh?" He looked sternly at the seamen who were crowded along the bar. "Time to stop all this. Time to get aboard. 'Op to it, you blighters! Finish yer drinks an' get along with yer."

He scowled, and ordered a glass of beer for himself and one for his junior officer. It was then I noticed the young man's hands. They were thin and nicely molded. The dirt on his fingers couldn't hide the fact that these hands had done little work. I watched the fingers curl about the glass—watched the hand lift the glass in a gesture toward the older man. Then I looked quickly at the roistering seamen.

Something—I couldn't put a finger on the answer, but something was wrong. They were a hard lot, all of them. But with all their cursing and shouting, I caught an undercurrent of respect in their voices when they spoke to the officers. They didn't crowd too closely. Didn't slap their heavy hands on the younger man's shoulder or offer to buy him another drink. And whenever the door opened, these drunken seamen turned from their drinking to look curiously at each newcomer.

A GAIN the senior officer yelled that it was time to go. As he spoke, I saw a stiffening in the attitude of the seamen. They growled a few complaints and emptied their glasses. Then the smoke-filled air swirled with a breath of night that came in through the open door. With it came two men whose walk was part of the sea. They were arm in arm, each supporting the other, and it was evident this was but one stop of many they had made this evening.

"Beer," said one. "Beer fer two un'appy men. Beer fer two gunners as aint got no guns."

"Aye," said the other. "We is too old, they says. 'Owie an' me is too old. Fancy that, naow! Too old, they says!"

That brought a laugh. The patrons of the pub gathered about the complaining seamen. Beers were set up and quickly downed. The taller of the two men banged a hard fist against the bar, and turned to address the room and the world at large.

"Offered our services, we did! Told 'em as 'ow we was the best gunners in the Navy. Turned us down fer bein' old. A fine thing, that's whut! A fine thing! 'Ere we are, two gunners in the wery prime o' life, 'Owie an' me. An' they turned us down!" He looked solemnly at his companion. "Didn' they turn us down, 'Owie?"

"They turned us down," said Howie.

"Didn' we tell 'em we wuz gunners, 'Owie?"

"We told 'em we wuz gunners," said Howie.

The big man rested his arms upon the bar. He rested his face upon his arms. He wept loudly for a time. Then he looked about the room again.

FOUR blinkin' years we served," he said darkly. "Sunk an' sunk, an' sunk again, wasn't we, 'Owie?"

"We wuz sunk," said Howie solemnly.

"An' we kep' right on fightin' the blinkin' 'Uns, didn' we, 'Owie?"

"We kep' on fightin'," Howie echoed.

"An' now they turn us down fer bein' too old. A shime, that's whut it is. A blinkin' shime!" He stared along the bar—looked accusingly at each man. "It's all wery well to put young-uns on the guns, but 'ow does we know they're fit to carry on? 'Ow does we know?"

The publican drew another glass of beer. The war was young, and men were still working at men's jobs. Barmaids hadn't come to this Limehouse pub as yet. The red-faced man in the white apron pushed the foaming glass toward the taller seaman.

"Drink it down, Wullie," he said.

"This is on the 'ouse."

Willie nodded. He lifted his glass and looked about. Of a sudden, he was highly disinterested in the beer. His old blue eyes had fastened upon the older merchant officer. They bored in through the two days' growth of stubble on the lean jaw. He stood erect. Brought one heavy hand toward his right ear.

"Cap'n Driscoll, sir!" he said. "Cap'n Driscoll—you remember Wullie Tink'am,

sir, as wuz yer gunner's mate aboard the *Thunderer*? You do, sir—oh, yer must!"

"Shut yer jaw!" said one of the merchant crew. He moved forward and hunched his shoulders. "Ye're drunk—that's 'ow!"

"Drunk an' nahsty," said another. "Bash 'is face, Tommy!"

Fighting would have started with the next word. But Willie had closed his mouth. He looked wisely at the older officer. Looked at the pink-faced boy. His jaws worked, and he rubbed a broken knuckle against his lips. Howie stood beside him. He too was staring. A sudden silence had filled the room. Even the heavy cloud of smoke seemed slowed in its movement by something that had grown within the four walls of the pub.

"We'd like to come along, an' it pleases yer," said Willie. He spoke quietly. "We un'erstands, an' we'd like t'come along."

"We'd like to come along," echoed Howie.

Captain Driscoll set down his glass. He put a wide hand across his mouth and studied the men who faced him. "Wullie Tink'am, eh?" he said slowly. "Can't say as I remember you, Wullie. Nor you, either, 'Owie. Still, I could use two seamen aboard the *India Maid*. Come along—both of yer."

He motioned to the others and headed toward the door. Willie and Howie had grown sober in a moment. They braced their shoulders, stiffened their backs and followed. Others of the crew crowded about them. Soon the pub was emptied, save for the dock-workers and merchantmen, who looked from one to the other with puzzled eyes.

THAT much I remembered of the night in Limehouse. I told it to young Sub-Lieutenant Bryan, and watched his eyes glow with amusement as I described the scene.

"Yes," he said at length. "I was the young merchant officer. Rotten job of camouflage, no doubt. Captain Driscoll was an old hand. Good thing he was, or we'd never have carried it off. Willie and Howie almost spoiled it that night."

"I'm still putting two and two together," I said. "Captain Driscoll was in command of the *India Maid*, of course. And I know that information about sailings had been getting through to Germany. He probably figured it was coming from Limehouse, and he staged that little scene to make sure a submarine would be waiting when you sailed."

"That's it," said Sub-Lieutenant Bryan. "He'd sent the crew along to drink and talk. Hadn't counted upon Willie Tinkham and Howard Knowles, though. That was accident."

I smiled. "Then they'd actually been turned down by the Navy?"

"Certainly."

"What did you do with them?" I asked. And once more I called the steward. When he came to the table, I suggested he leave the bottle.

YOU can well understand (said Sub-Lieutenant Bryan), the one thought in Captain Driscoll's mind was to get that old pair of seamen out of the pub before their tongues did too much damage. There was no room aboard the *India Maid* for civilians. Not on this trip. But Willie and Howie didn't stop to think about that. We headed for the Commercial Docks, and they marched along with the crew, proud and happy as could be.

There was fog that night. Willie Tinkham drew a deep breath of it into his chest and pursed his big lips. "*Oh, they're 'agin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!*" he sang. "*The regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us aw'y! An' they're 'agin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!*"

"Stow that!" said one of the crew. He looked sharply at the old seaman.

Willie drew himself erect. He must have been a monster of a man in his day. He was getting on for sixty, but you could still see the rounds of muscle on his shoulders beneath the old blue pea-coat. His eyes were deep-set, and he glared at the man who had spoken.

"Mind yer lip, young-un," he growled. "I'll 'ave yer know ye're speakin' wif Gunner Tink'am of 'is Majesty's Naivy!" He turned to the smaller man who marched beside him. "Lack o' discipline, that's whut I calls it, 'Owie. Lack o' discipline!"

"Aye," said Howie. He thrust his head forward, stretching the gaunt cords in his old neck. "Lack o' discipline, that's whut!"

I thought I heard Captain Driscoll chuckle. I might have been wrong. The Captain was Old Navy—hard in his ways. He glanced back at the pair behind him.

"Stop that noise, Tinkham!" he said. "Quiet, both of you!"

"Aye, sir," said Willie. He nudged the smaller man at his side. "Quiet, 'Owie! Quiet it is!"

"Quiet it is," echoed the little gunner.

At the docks Captain Driscoll sent the crew aboard the *India Maid*. They went silently, stepping along the narrow gangway to the iron decks of the rusty old freighter. Willie Tinkham started after them, and Howie Knowles was at his heels. Then I heard Captain Driscoll draw a deep breath, as a man might who is about to dive into deep and chilly water.

"One moment, Tinkham," he said. He stepped in front of the ancient pair. "I'm afraid I won't be able to take you along with me this time. Might cause trouble, you know. Extra men in the ship's company, and all that." He'd used up the first breath and drew another. "Not that I wouldn't like to have you come along. Lord knows, I could use two fine gunners like you and Knowles. Best man I had aboard the *Thunderer*. Regulations, though. Can't be done. Sorry."

Willie had been standing tall and straight. He slumped now. His shoulders drooped and on his face grew a wistful frown.

"Yer means we can't come wif yer, Cap'n?" he said slowly. "Yer means me an' 'Owie can't come along?"

"I'm afraid that's it," said the Captain.

Willie looked down at his friend. "Yer 'ear that, 'Owie?" he said. "The Cap'n says we can't come along."

"Can't come along?" said Howie. He shook his head in evident bewilderment.

We left them, then: Two old men on a fog-covered dock.

THE *India Maid* cleared at midnight. Morning found us threading the minefields that fan out from Dover. At times a low gray destroyer would flash alongside while her officers studied us through glasses. We weren't a pretty picture. Not worth a second glance from a man o' war. Hardly worth the price of a torpedo to a German submarine commander. The *India Maid* belonged to the class of freighters whose obituary notice usually reads: "Sunk by shell-fire off the Irish coast."

Captain Driscoll walked his bridge with a pipe between his teeth. His merchant jacket was open to the last button. On deck a shiftless crew of eight men went about their work of stowing lines and clearing gear. There was no hurry. Eight knots was our cruising speed, and the *India Maid* moved stupidly along,

pushing her blunt bow into the waves that a stiff sou'wester had built in the Channel. At times the Captain would pause to bawl an order to one of the mates. One such order sent me to the boat-deck with four men.

The lifeboats were to be swung out on their davits, a war-time precaution taken by all merchantmen. One of the seamen, at an order from me, had started to fold back the dirty canvas cover of the first boat. It fouled, and he climbed the gunwale to clear the lashings. I saw his eyes widen. His mouth was open, but he seemed to be having difficulty with his words.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Wrong, sir?" he gasped. "We've a couple of passengers, that's 'ow! Stow-aways, no less!"

AND up they came—Willie and Howie of Rotherhite. No word of apology. They climbed over the side of the lifeboat, dropped down onto the deck and stood to attention.

"We's reportin' fer duty, sir," said Willie.

"Aye, sir," echoed Howie. "Reportin' fer duty."

"How the devil did you get aboard?" I asked.

"Clumb aboard, sir," said Willie. His big hands jerked the creases from his pea-coat, and there was reproach in his eyes. "These New Navy fellers keeps a woeful bad watch, sir. Woeful bad."

"Woeful bad," said Howie. He bobbed his old head that was about even with his partner's shoulder. "Woeful bad fer Navy men, sir."

It should have been funny, but it wasn't. I'd been in charge of the watch before we cleared. And Captain Driscoll wasn't the man to wink at slackness. Knowing what was coming to me, I told those old fools exactly what I thought of them. They never batted an eyelid. Simply stood at attention and stared straight ahead.

The Captain was in the starboard wing of the bridge when I hustled the stow-aways before him. He jammed both hands into the pockets of his jacket, and waited until I had made my report. Then he looked long at Willie.

"Decided to come along, did you, Tinkham?" he said finally.

"Yes sir," said Willie.

"You know I ought to toss both of you into the brig?"

"Yes sir."



"How the devil did you get aboard?" I asked.

Captain Driscoll wiped a hand across his jaw. "And you know damn' well I won't."

"We 'opes yer won't," said Willie.

"Aye, sir," added Howie, "we 'opes yer won't."

The Captain turned to look at the sea. It was blue and clear and very bright. Perhaps the sun-streak bothered his eyes.

WE were through and beyond the mine-fields at sunset. The wind had freshened, and the ship was taking them over with a sickening regularity. A merchant crew would have welcomed those waves. Submarines don't function well in weather. Not the smaller ones, at least. But there had been rumors lately that the Germans had launched some of those old type monsters.

"Big as cruisers, that's whut," said Willie Tinkham. "Mounts a six-inch gun, an' does twenty knots without 'arf tryin'."

He was seated at a long wooden table in what had once been the after hold of the *India Maid*. Now it had been converted into crew's quarters for a group of men never seen on deck. Big fellows, these. For as you've guessed, the *India Maid* was the first of our new fleet of Q-boats, and these men were two prize gun-crews: the pick of the British Navy.

A blue lamp was set in the overhead. It gave the place a ghostly touch, and painted the faces of the men who watched the card-players. Willie Tinkham dealt slowly to his partner. He turned a card and slapped the deck upon it.

"'Arts is trumps," he said, "'an yer owes me two shillin'."

"Aye," said Howie. "'Arts is trumps."

Then it came—the rolling thud of a big gun fired at close range. It was the sound for which we had been waiting ever since the *India Maid* left her dock in London. It meant a submarine had risen to the bait and had put a shell across our bow.

"Battle stations!" I ordered.

One crew raced toward a narrow passage leading forward. The other leaped to the iron ladder at hand. Ammunition-handlers stood to their posts near the racks, ready to pass along the blunt-nosed shells, should the fight prove long. My place was on the after gun. As I ran toward the ladder, I remembered the two old seamen.

"On deck, both of you," I said. "Join the panic-party. There's still time to get off."

"We knows there's time, sir," said Willie. He squinted at his cards, and played a ten of clubs. "There's always 'eaps o' time."

"Aye," said Howie. He put a diamond on the ten and started to pick up the trick. "'Eaps o' time, sir. Just 'eaps o' time."

Willie's big hand slapped against the table. "Caught yer, I did! You know wery well 'arts is trumps, 'Owie Knowles! You gimme that trick, that's what!"

"Bli'me," said Howie, and he shook his head. "'Ow ever did I forget?"

Perhaps those two old-timers were pretending. I doubt it. At the time, I



The submarine ran alongside the lifeboat, and her

thought they were both stark mad. I looked above. The hatch leading to the after deckhouse was clear, and I climbed to take charge of the crew.

They were kneeling about the base of our five-inch gun, peering through slots in the bulkheads of the dummy superstructure. I knelt beside our gun-pointer and glanced along the deck. The panic-party had gone into action. It was up to them to put on the show, and the entire deck-crew was running toward a lifeboat on the port side. Behind them came the black-gang, grimy men in sweat-stained clothes. They fought with the seamen, pushed them aside and tried to swing the lifeboat clear. The second mate drew his gun—threatened the crew. He shouted meaningless orders.

"Nice work," said the man beside me.

"Very nice," I answered.

CAPTAIN DRISCOLL had left the bridge, and in his place was the first mate, dressed in the Captain's merchant jacket and cap.

He shook his fist toward the sea, hurried down the ladder from the bridge and joined the panic-party. The falls were slacked quickly, and the lifeboat splashed into the gray water. Oars were manned, and the boat-crew pulled.

I went to another slot and looked at the submarine awash off our port beam. Willie had been right. The ship was almost as long as a light cruiser, and on her forward deck was a six-inch gun. She was staring off at a distance of two thou-

sand yards, while her officers studied the *India Maid* through glasses.

"I could drop one right on her bridge, sir," said the gun-layer, one of the men we had drawn from the *Warspite*. "I could, sir, nice as you please."

"You might," I said, "but we can't afford to risk it. She'll come closer."

That was a wish, and not a very good one. The sub ran down-wind, circled the *India Maid* and came up to starboard.

Still her officers were studying our decks. Then the long barrel of her gun swung, and I saw it line up with our bridge. There was a burst of flame, and I heard my first shell scream, . . .

It hit like a thunderbolt. The *India Maid* lurched. One wing of her bridge fell apart. A blue-gray cloud of smoke lifted to join the black stream that poured from her funnel. I glanced along the deck toward a passage in the lower section of the bridge. Captain Driscoll was there, screened from the watchers on the submarine. He was no longer the careless merchant skipper. There was gold on the cuffs of his sleeves now. There was gold on the visor of his cap.

He lifted one hand—held it palm down. It was an order.

"Hold your fire," I said to my men.

The *India Maid* had long since lost headway. The submarine circled our bow, careful to keep at a safe distance. Then she ran alongside the lifeboat, and her officers were questioning the men. It was quiet in the deckhouse—so quiet I



officers were questioning the men of the panic-party.

could hear each man of the gun-crew breathing. Minutes went by. They might have been hours. Then the sub squared off our port beam, and her gun blazed. The shot burst at the rail, tearing away the coaming of a hatch. A shell-fragment ripped through the flimsy bulkhead of our deckhouse and spanged against the gun barrel. I heard a man gasp.

"Cowper's got it, sir," said the gun-layer. "Got it bad."

"Take him below," I ordered.

TWO thousand yards; perhaps a little more. It was a good range for fighting. A destroyer would have asked nothing better. But the *India Maid* wasn't a destroyer. She was slow. She was old. She had just one mission in life, one reason for existence. Captain Driscoll had made no secret of it when he spoke to the crew at sailing-time. "Under no condition," he had said, "are you to fire until a submarine comes within one thousand yards. You may only get off one shot, but that one must be a direct hit. We'll consider it a fair exchange—the *India Maid* for a German submarine." And those were my orders.

I watched the crew on the deck of the sub reload the gun. It was a taut crew. Fast! No doubt the pick of the German Navy had been put aboard that sub. She deserved it. There was enough wind in the Channel to keep her in constant motion, but the gun-barrel never wavered. They fired again, and the shell tore a

second hole in our bridge. The next landed forward, and I wondered about the men on our four-inch gun. They too were waiting—crouching behind the collapsible walls of a dummy lifeboat on the Number One hatch.

"Rotten bad shootin', I calls it, sir," said a quiet voice at my elbow.

It was Willie Tinkham. The old faker was squatting below the breech of our gun, playing a hand of pinochle with Howie Knowles. His upper lip was drawn between his teeth, and he shook his head in evident disapproval as he melded a marriage. Howie, as usual, acted as his mirror. The little gunner sat cross-legged on deck studying his cards.

"Aye, rotten bad shootin', even fer 'Uns," he said. His eyes were troubled. "Look 'ere, Wullie—I've lost a card, so I 'ave."

"Trust you fer that!" said Willie. He sighed and looked up at the waiting gun-crew. "'As any o' you young gentlemun got a spare deck about yer? We'll be most careful of it."

That brought a laugh, and I forgave them their sins. Lord knows, we needed a laugh in that deckhouse. Tension had been growing. Serving a gun is one thing—waiting patiently under shell-fire is quite another. And we had to wait. Had to take everything the sub could hand us, until she came within a thousand yards.

Captain Driscoll had left the passage—gone forward to keep an eye on the

other gun crew. The sub was cruising past our stern, standing well off and holding her fire. I judged the distance to be over two thousand yards. Nothing to do but wait. She slipped by to starboard, crossed our bow and ran down to port. The silence was ominous. Far worse than shell-fire.

"Do you think she's wise, sir?" asked a powder-man.

I wished he hadn't asked. It was the same question that had been troubling me. Not a pleasant thought. We'd all heard stories of Q-boats that had been caught by the subs in the old war. The Germans had played cat-and-mouse with them. Cleared their decks with shrapnel. Machine-gunned the lifeboats. All fair enough, and part of a war, but not nice to think about.

"SIXTY queens," said Willie. He put down his meld and glanced casually at the powder-man. Then he looked at his partner. "Just as I feared, 'Owie. This 'ere new generation haint got no patience. No patience at all."

"No patience at all," said Howie. "Take a card."

If these old seamen could put on such a show, the least I could do was carry on. I tried, but I couldn't laugh. Not now. A shell burst forward, and the *India Maid* staggered. I heard a scream. Not a loud scream; it was as though the sound had been torn from the throat of a stricken man, despite tightly clenched teeth.

"They got the for'ard gun, sir," said the powder-man.

"I'm afraid so, Bonnet," I answered.

His face was gray. I'm sure mine was too.

"Forty pinochle," said Willie Tinkham. And again he looked up at the powder-man. "Only takes one gun to sink a sub, sonny. Yer got a wery fine gun right 'ere. Best gun I ever see, haint it, 'Owie?"

"Oh, wery fine," said Howie. He lifted one hand to pat the shining breech. "A wery fine gun indeed. Take a card, Wullie."

Fifteen hundred yards. Perhaps it was only a thousand. They'd holed us twice in the past five minutes. How could a man count yards when his ship was sinking under his feet? I looked toward the place where the passage had been. There was a smoking heap of twisted wreckage there now. There was a man there, too—in a torn blue coat with gold on the

cuffs of the sleeves. One arm hung limp, but the other was held at shoulder height. The hand was still palm down.

"Not yet," I said to the crew.

A man sobbed. I didn't blame him. A shell had cleared the bridge, and we could see what was left of the forward gun. And the crew. Captain Driscoll was crawling toward us, hidden by the rim of the hatch. At times he paused to look toward the sea. Counting the yards. Waiting. . . . The sub's gun flared. Spinning steel crashed through the bulkheads. It whirled along the deck. I looked again for Captain Driscoll. Blue-gray smoke lifted above the hatch, but the torn blue coat with the gold on its cuffs was gone. Gone forever.

"How long must we wait, sir?" cried the gun-layer. "Gord above, sir—how long?"

"Lots o' time," said Willie Tinkham. "As Kiplin' wrote in a wery fine book, 'When patience is a wirtue, it be a sin to waste good ammunition.' Them's 'is wery words, lad. I read 'em meself."

Fifteen hundred yards. She was coming closer, swinging her bow toward us. I lifted my hand. Held it rigid. Just a little closer. A hundred yards closer. Fifty. She must be within the limit now.

"Such impatience," said Willie Tinkham. "In the Old Navy, we always waited much longer, didn't we, 'Owie?"

"Aye," said Howie. "Much longer."

Now was the time. I dropped my hand, and the gun-crew leaped toward the bulkheads. They pulled the taugles and threw down the wooden screens—stepped smartly to the gun.

"Range, one-o double-o! Scale, five-o!" I cried. "Fire when you're on!"

The crash of an exploding shell covered my words. The Germans had beaten us to it. Done a good job with this one—a butcher's job. Something tugged at my arm. At my leg. I tried to stand, tried to push myself up from the deck. It was no use. Men were down all about me—crawling and moaning.

I saw what was left of the gun-point-er's face.

"One shell!" I cried. "Just one!"

A TALL, gaunt man climbed out of the ruins. He shook his head and wiped blood from his lips. He stumbled forward. He bent and pulled another man erect.

"Get up orf yer 'unkers, 'Owie," he said. "Whut yer doin' down there, eh?"

"Restin', that's whut,"
 "No time fer restin'. Find the flag,
 'Owie."

"Righto!" said the little gunner. He pointed a dripping hand toward a staff caught beneath one wall of the deck-house. He lifted the staff and shook it, freed the red-crossed battle standard that flies above a British man-o'-war. Then he wedged it tightly in a gash in the deck.

"Take a good look at that, yer blinkin' Uns!" he called. He shook a fist toward the sea. "An' now let's see 'ow yer can fight!"

The rest is a dream. A mad whirling nightmare. I saw the gray barrel swing toward the sub. Heard the gun crash, and tried to get another shell into the breech. A man was beside me. A scarecrow figure with only one arm. He was pawing at a powder-case. A dark shape took it and moved away. Again the gun spewed flame.

"That was 'igh, Wullie," said a voice. "Just a mite 'igh. Do yer think maybe we're gettin' old?"

"Seems like," said his partner. "Up a bit! Ah—that's fine. *Fine!*"

THE flash of the gun and the shock of the recoil. . . . Those two old men talking as they fired. One coaxing the other. Broken men limping forward with a shell for the breech. Cursing men, who stumbled to their knees and couldn't get up again. All turning and twisting in a red dream.

"Woeful bad shootin' fer gunners as served aboard the old *Thunderer*," said Willie. "Can't yer keep on the blighters, 'Owie?"

"Aye," said Howie. "I'm on, pretty as a duck. Fire, Wullie. Fire, why don't yer?"

"Fire, says you? An' 'ow can I fire a h'empty gun?"

"Whut—no loaders left?"

"Not a blinkin' soul, 'Owie."

"Fancy that, naow," said the little gunner. "An' whut about th' young-un in command? 'As 'e gone along wif th' rest?"

Something tugged at my jacket. I looked up into the red ruin of an old face—part of a face.

"Not quite gone," said Willie. "Whut say we send 'im 'ome?"

"Aye," said Howie. "We'll send 'im 'ome."

I was pulled to my knees and dragged clear of the gun. No use to protest. They didn't hear me. Wouldn't hear me. A

lifebelt was strapped about my shoulders. I remember striking at that broken face. It laughed.

"Bli-me!" said a deep voice. "The young-un don't want to leave us. Stout feller, 'ey whut? Would yer say 'e's fit to carry on?"

"Aye," said Howie. "Wery fit indeed."

IT tells long—but it happened in a moment. Neither had the strength to lift me. They dragged me across the slanting deck. I felt cold water about my shoulders. A wave hit my face.

"Orf yer go, sir," said Willie. "The panic-party's 'eadin' back. Comin' fast, they is, sir. You'll be safe aboard in a jiffy."

I shook my head. Cursed them. Willie of Rotherhithe stood waist-deep on the slanting deck and pushed me into the sea. I ordered him to leave. . . . Begged them both to leave before the *India Maid* sank under their feet.

"We thanks yer kindly, sir," said Willie, "but we'd like to stay an' 'ave another try. An' if yer thinkin' as 'ow we done a woeful bad job fer gunners as served aboard the *Thunderer*, we arks yer kind indulgence, because our eyes is old. Still, we'd like to stay an' 'ave another try."

"Aye," said Howie. "We'd like another try."

Then I was alone in a dark sea. I watched the stern of the *India Maid* drifting away—watched the two old men stagger toward a silent gun. The long barrel swung. Flame leaped from its mouth. It tore a red gash in the night. . . . And this time the shell found its target.

"Got 'em!" cried Willie of Rotherhithe. His voice was thin in the distance. "Pretty as yer please, 'Owie! Got 'em, I did!"

"You did?" said his partner. "An' whut, may I arsk, would yer say I wuz doin'?"

There was the sound of oars, and the ripple of water curling from a lifeboat's bow.

Then a hand touched my shoulder—drew me clear of the sea and into the boat. About me men were standing with their faces turned toward the sinking freighter. I looked, too. I saw the dark water close over the *India Maid's* stern. And as she went, I thought I heard an old voice call: "*Carry on, young-uns! Carry on!*" I thought I heard another join it: "*Aye, young-uns! Carry on!*"

It might have been only the wind.

TARZAN and the

*The old hero (and little Nkima) returns
to us in a swift-moving novelette.*

SIX—seven—eight—nine—*ten!*" The referee stepped to a neutral corner and hoisted Mullargan's right hand. "The winnah and new champion!" he shouted.

For a moment the audience, which only partially filled Madison Square Garden, sat in stunned and stupefied silence; then there was a burst of applause, intermingled with which was an almost equal volume of boos. It wasn't that the booers questioned the correctness of the decision—they just didn't like Mullargan, a notoriously dirty fighter. Doubtless, too, many of them had had their dough on the champion.

Joey Marks, Mullargan's manager, and the other man who had been in his corner crawled through the ropes and slapped Mullargan on the back; photographers, sports-writers, police, and a part of the audience converged on the ring; jittery news-commentators bawled the epochal tidings to a waiting world.

The former champion, revived but a bit wobbly, crossed the ring and proffered a congratulatory hand to Mullargan. The new champion did not take the hand. "Gwan, you bum," he said, and turned his back. . . .

"One-Punch" Mullargan had come a long way in a little more than a year—from amateur to preliminary fighter, to Heavyweight Champion of the World; and he had earned his sobriquet. He had, in truth, but one punch; and he needed but that one—a lethal right to the button. Sometimes he had had to wait several rounds before he found an opening, but eventually he had always found it. The former champion, a ten-to-one favorite at ringside, had gone down in the third round. Since then, One-Punch Mullargan had fought but nine rounds; yet he had successfully defended his championship six times, leaving three men with broken jaws and one with a fractured skull. After all, who wishes his skull fractured?

So One-Punch Mullargan decided to take a vacation and do something he always had wanted to do but which fate

had always heretofore intervened to prevent. Several years before, he had seen a poster which read, "JOIN THE NAVY AND SEE THE WORLD;" he had always remembered that poster; and now, with a vacation on his hands, Mullargan decided to go and see the world for himself, without any assistance from Navy or Marines.

"I aint never seen Niag'ra Falls," said his manager. "That would be a nice place to go for a vacation. If we was to go there, that would give Niag'ra Falls a lot of publicity too."

"Niag'ra Falls, my foot!" said Mullargan. "We're goin' to Africa."

"Africa," mused Mr. Marks. "That's a hell of a long ways off—down in South America somewheres. Wot you wanna go there for?"

"Huntin'. You seen them heads in that guy's house what we were at after the fight the other night, didn't you? Lions, buffaloes, elephants. Gee! That must be some sport."

"We aint lost no lions, kid," said Marks. There was a note of pleading in his voice. "Listen, kid: stick around here for a couple more fights; then you'll have enough potatoes to retire on, and you can go to Africa or any place you want to—but not me."

"I'm goin' to Africa, and you're goin' with me. If you want to get some publicity out of it, you better call up them newspaper bums."

SPORTS-WRITERS and camera-men milled about the champion on the deck of the ship ten days later. Bulbs flashed; shutters clicked; reporters shot questions; passengers crowded closer with craning necks; a girl elbowed her way through the throng with an autograph album.

"When did he learn to write?" demanded a Daily News man.

"Wise guy," growled Mullargan.

"Give my love to Tarzan when you get to Africa," said another.

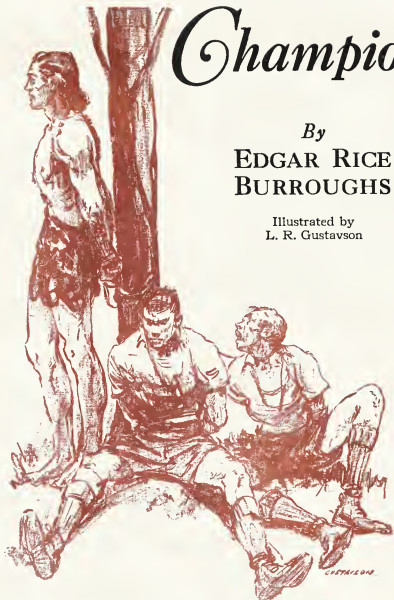
"And don't get fresh with him, or he'll take you apart," interjected the Daily News man.

Champion

By

EDGAR RICE
BURROUGHS

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"I seen that bum in pitchers," said Mullargan. "He couldn't take nobody apart."

"I'll lay you ten to one he could K.O. you in the first round," taunted the Daily News man.

"You aint got ten, you bum," retorted the champion.

A HEAVILY laden truck lumbered along the edge of a vast plain under the guns of the forest which had halted here, sending out a scattering of pickets to reconnoiter the terrain held by the enemy. Why the tree army never advanced, why the plain always held its own—these are mysteries.

And the lorry was a mystery to the man far out on the plain, who watched its

slow advance. He knew that there were no tracks there, that perhaps since creation this was the first wheeled vehicle that had ever passed this way.

A white man in a disreputable sun-helmet drove the truck; beside him sat a black man; sprawled on top of the load were several other blacks. The lengthening shadow of the forest stretched far beyond the crawling anachronism, marking the approach of the brief equatorial twilight.

The man out upon the plain set his course so that he might meet the truck. He moved with an easy, sinuous stride that was almost catlike in its smoothness. He wore no clothes other than a loin-cloth; his weapons were primitive: a quiver of arrows and a bow at his back,



"Gwan, you bum," said Mullargan, and turned his back.

a hunting-knife in a rude scabbard at his hip, a short, stout spear that he carried in his hand. Looped across one shoulder and beneath the opposite arm was a coil of grass rope. The man was very dark, but he was not a negro. A lifetime beneath the African sun accounted for his bronzed skin.

Upon his shoulder squatted a little monkey, one arm around the bronzed neck. "Tarmangani, Nkima," said the man, looking in the direction of the truck.

"Tarmangani," chattered the monkey. "Nkima and Tarzan will kill the *tarmangani*." He stood up and blew out his cheeks and looked very ferocious. At a great distance from an enemy, or when upon the shoulder of his master, little Nkima was a lion at heart. His courage was in inverse ratio to the distance that separated him from Tarzan, and in direct ratio to that which lay between himself and danger. If little Nkima had been a man, he would probably have been a gangster and certainly a bully; but he still would have been a coward. Being just a little monkey, he was only amusing. He did, however, possess one characteristic which, upon occasion, elevated him almost to heights of sublimity. That was his self-sacrificing loyalty to his master, Tarzan.

At last the man on the truck saw the man on foot, saw that they were going to meet a little farther on. He shifted his pistol to a more accessible position and loosened it in its holster. He glanced at

the rifle that the boy beside him was holding between his knees, and saw that it was within easy reach. He had never been in this locality before, and did not know the temper of the natives. It was well to take precautions. As the distance between them lessened, he sought to identify the stranger.

"*Mtu mweusi?*" he inquired of the boy beside him, who was also watching the approaching stranger.

"*Mzungu, bwana,*" replied the boy.

"I guess you're right," agreed the man. "I guess he's a white man, all right, but he's sure dressed up like a native."

"*Menyi wazimo,*" laughed the boy.

"I got two crazy men on my hands now," said the man. "I don't want another." He brought the truck to a stop as Tarzan approached.

LITTLE NKIMA was chattering and scolding fiercely, baring his teeth in what he undoubtedly thought was a terrifying snarl. Nobody paid any attention to him, but he held his ground until Tarzan was within fifty feet of the truck; then he leaped to the ground and sought the safety of a tree near by. After all, what was the use of tempting fate?

Tarzan stopped beside the truck and looked up into the white man's face. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

Melton, looking down upon an almost naked man, felt his own superiority; and resented the impertinence of the query. Incidentally, he had noted that the stranger carried no firearms.

"I'm drivin' a lorry, buddy," he said. "Answer my question." This time Tarzan's tone had an edge to it.

Melton had had a hard day. As a matter of fact, he had had a number of hard days. He was worried, and his nerves were on edge. His hand moved to the butt of his pistol as he formulated a caustic rejoinder, but he never voiced it. Tarzan's arm shot out; his hand seized Melton's wrist and dragged the man from the cab of the truck. An instant later he was disarmed.

Nkima danced up and down upon the branch of his tree and hurled jungle billingsgate at the enemy, intermittently screaming at Tarzan to kill the *tarman-gani*. No one paid any attention to him. That was a cross that Nkima always had to bear. He was so little and insignificant that no one ever paid any attention to him.

The blacks on the truck sat in wide-eyed confusion. The thing had happened so suddenly that it had caught their wits off guard. They saw the stranger dragging Melton away from the truck, shaking him as a dog shakes a rat. Tarzan had learned from experience that there is no surer way of reducing a man to subservience than by shaking him. Perhaps he knew nothing of the psychology of the truth, but he knew the truth.

The latter was a powerful man, but he was helpless in the grip of the stranger; and he was frightened, too. There was something more terrifying about this creature than his superhuman strength. There was the quite definite sensation of being in the clutches of a wild beast, so that his reactions were much the same as they had been many years before when he had been mauled by a lion—something of a fatalistic resignation to the inevitable.

Tarzan stopped shaking Melton and turned his eyes on the boy with the rifle, who had jumped down from the truck. "Throw down the rifle," he said in Swahili.

The boy hesitated. "Throw it down," ordered Melton; and then, to Tarzan: "What do you want of me?"

"I asked you what you were doing here. I want an answer."

"I'm guidin' a couple of bloomin' Yanks."

"Where are they?"

Melton shrugged. "Gawd only knows. They started out early this morning in a light car, and told me to keep along the edge of the forest. Said they'd come back

an' meet me later in the day. They're probably lost. They're both balmy."

"What are they doing here?" asked Tarzan.

"Hunting."

"Why did you bring them here? This is closed territory."

"I didn't bring 'em here; they brought me. You can't tell Mullargan nothing. He's one of those birds that knows it all. He don't need a guide; what he needs is a keeper. He's Heavyweight Champion of the World, and it's gone to his head. Try to tell him anything, and he's just as likely as not to slap you down. He's knocked the boys around something awful. I never saw such a rotten bounder in my life. The other one aint so bad. He's Mullargan's manager. That's a laugh. Manager, my eye! All he says is, 'Yes, kid!' 'Okay, kid!' and all he wants to do is get back to New York. He's scared to death all the time. I wish to hell they was both back in New York. I wish I was rid of 'em."

"Are they out alone?" asked Tarzan.

"Yes."

"Then you may be rid of them. This is lion country. I have never seen them so bad."

Melton whistled. "Then I got to push on and try to find 'em. I don't like 'em, but I'm responsible for 'em. You"—he hesitated—"you aint goin' to try to stop me, are you?"

"No," said Tarzan. "Go and find them, and tell them to get out of this country and stay out." Then he started on toward the forest.

When he had gone a short distance, Melton called to him. "Who are you, anyway?" he demanded.

The ape-man paused and turned around. "I am Tarzan," he said.

Again Melton whistled. He climbed back into the cab of the truck and started the motor; and as the heavy vehicle got slowly under way, Tarzan disappeared into the forest.

THE sun swung low into the west, and the lengthening shadow of the forest stretched far out into the plain. A light car bounced and bumped over the uneven ground. There were two men in the car. One of them drove, and the other braced himself and held on. His eyes were red-rimmed; he sneezed almost continuously.

"Fer cripe's sake, kid, can't you slow down?" wailed Marks. "Aint this hay-fever bad enough without you tryin' to jounce the liver out of me?"

For answer, Mullargan pressed the accelerator down a little farther.

"You won't have no springs or no tires or no manager, if you don't slow down."

"I don't need no manager no more." That struck Mullargan as being so funny that he repeated it. "I don't need no manager no more; so I bounces him out in Africa. Gee, wouldn't dat give the guys a laugh!"

"Don't get no foolish ideas in your head, kid. You need a smart fella like me, all right. All you got is below them big cauliflower ears of yours."

"Is zat so?"

"Yes, zat's so."

Mullargan slowed down a little, for it had suddenly grown dark. He switched on the lights. "It sure gets dark in a hurry here," he commented. "I wonder why."

"It's the altitude, you dope," explained Marks.

They rode on in silence for a while. Marks glanced nervously to right and left, for with the coming of night, the entire aspect of the scene had changed as though they had been suddenly tossed into a strange world. The plain was dimly limned in the ghostly light of pale stars; the forest was solid, impenetrable blackness.

"Forty-second Street would look pretty swell right now," observed Marks.

"So would some grub," said Mullargan; "my belly's wrapped around my backbone. I wonder what became of that so-an'-so. I told him to keep right on till he met us. Them English is too damn' cocky—think they know it all, tellin' me not to do this an' not to do that. I guess the Champeen of the World can take care of himself, all right."

"You said it, kid."

THE silence of the plain was broken by the grunting of a hunting lion. It was still some distance away, but the sound came plainly to the ears of the two men.

"What was that?" queried Mullargan.

"A pig," said Marks.

"If it was daylight, we might get a shot at it," observed Mullargan. "A bunch of pork chops wouldn't go so bad right now. You know, Joey, I been thinkin' me and you could get along all right without that English so-an'-so."

"Who'd drive the truck?"

"That's so," admitted Mullargan; "but he's got to stop treatin' us like we was a couple o' kids and he was our nurse-girl. Pretty soon I'm goin' to get sore and hand him one."

"Look!" exclaimed Marks. "There's a light—it must be the truck."

When the two cars met, the tired men dropped to the ground and stretched stiffened limbs and cramped muscles.

"Where you been?" demanded Mullargan.

"Coming right along ever since we broke camp," replied Melton. "You know this bus can't cover the ground like that light car of yours, and you must have covered a lot of it today. Any luck?"

"No. I don't believe there's any game around here."

"There's plenty. If you'll make a permanent camp somewhere, as I've been telling you, we'll get something."

"We seen some buffaloes today," said Marks, "but they got away."

"They went into some woods," explained Mullargan. "I followed 'em in on foot, but they got away."

"Lucky for you they did," observed Melton.

"What you mean—lucky for me?"

"If you'd shot one of 'em, you'd probably have been killed. I'd rather face a lion any day than a wounded buffalo."

"Maybe you would," said Mullargan, "but I aint afraid of no cow."

MELTON shrugged, turned and set the boys to making camp. We've got to camp where we are," he said to the other two whites. "We couldn't find water now; and we've got enough anyway, such as it is. Anyway, tomorrow we must turn back."

"Turn back?" exclaimed Mullargan. "Who says we gotta turn back? I come here to hunt, an' I'm goin' to hunt."

"I met a man back there a way who says this is closed territory. He told me we'd have to get out."

"Oh, he did, did he? Who the hell does he think he is, tellin' me to get out? Did you tell him who I was?"

"Yes, but he didn't seem to be much impressed."

"Well, I'll impress him if I see him. Who was he?"

"His name is Tarzan."

"Dat bum? Does he think he can run me out of Africa?"

"If he tells you to leave this part of Africa, you'd better," Melton advised.

"I'll leave when I get good an' damn' ready," said Mullargan.

"I'm ready to go right now," said Marks, between sneezes. "This here Africa aint no place for a guy with hay-fever."



"Come on," he invited. "I'm just waitin' for the chance to plead guilty to killin' you in self-defense."

The boys were unloading the truck, hurrying to make camp. One was building a fire preparatory to cooking supper. There was much laughter, and now and then a snatch of native song. One of the boys, carrying a heavy load from the truck, accidentally bumped into Mullargan and threw him off his balance. The fighter swung a vicious blow at the black with his open palm, striking him across the side of his head and knocking him to the ground.

"You'll look where you're goin' next time," he growled.

Melton came up to him. "That'll be all of that," he said. "I've stood it as long as I'm goin' to. Don't ever hit another of these boys."

"So you're lookin' for it too, are you?" shouted Mullargan. "All right, you're goin' to get it."

Before he could strike, Melton drew his pistol and covered him. "Come on," he invited. "I'm just waitin' for the chance to plead guilty to killin' you in self-defense."

Mullargan stood staring at the gun for several seconds; then he turned away. Later he confided to Marks: "Them English aint got no sense of humor. He might of seen I was just kiddin'."

The evening meal was a subdued affair. Conversation could not accurately have

been said to lag, since it did not even exist until the meal was nearly over; then the grunting of a lion was heard close to the camp.

"There's that pig again," said Mullargan. "Maybe we can get him now."

"What pig?" asked Melton.

"You must be deaf," said Mullargan. "Can't you hear him?"

"Cripes!" exclaimed Marks. "Look at his eyes shine out there."

Melton rose and stepping to the side of the truck switched on the spotlight and swung it around upon the eyes. In the circle of bright light stood a full-grown lion. Just for a moment he stood there; then he turned and slunk off into the darkness.

"Pig!" said Mullargan, disgustedly.

A CHOCOLATE-COLORED people are the Babangos, with good features and well-shaped heads. Their teeth are not filed; yet they are inveterate man-eaters. There are no religious implications in their cannibalism, no superstitions. They eat human flesh because they like it, because they prefer it to any other food; and like true gourmets, they know how to prepare it. They hunt man as other men hunt game animals, and they are hated and feared throughout the territory that they raid.



Recently, word had been brought to Tarzan that the Babangos had invaded a remote portion of that vast domain which, from boyhood, he had considered his own; and Tarzan had come, making many marches, to investigate. Behind him, moving more slowly, came a band of his own white-plumed Waziri warriors, led by Muviro, their famous chief. . . .

It was the morning following Tarzan's encounter with Melton. The ape-man was swinging along just inside the forest at the edge of the plain, his every sense alert. There was no slightest suggestion of caution in his free stride and confident demeanor; yet he moved as silently as a shadow. He saw the puff adder in the grass and the python waiting in the tree to seize its prey from above, and he avoided them. He made a little detour, lest he pass beneath a trumpet tree from which black ants might drop upon and sting him.

PRESENTLY he halted and turned, looking back along the edge of the forest and the plain. Neither you nor I could have heard what he heard, because our lives have not depended to a great extent upon the keenness of our hearing. There are wild beasts which have notoriously poor eyesight, but none with poor hearing or a deficient sense of smell. Tarzan, being a man and therefore poorly equipped by nature to survive in his savage world, had developed all his senses to an extraordinary degree; and so it was that now he heard pounding hoofs in the far distance long before you or I could have. And he heard another sound—a sound as strange to that locale as would be the after-kill roar of a lion on Park Avenue: the exhaust of a motor.

They were coming closer now; and they were coming fast. And now there came another sound, drowning out the first—the staccato of a machine-gun. Presently they tore past him—a herd of zebra; and clinging to their flank was a light car. One man drove, and the other pumped lead from a sub-machine-gun in-

to the fleeing herd. Zebra fell, some killed, some only maimed; but the car sped on, its occupants ignoring the suffering beasts in its wake.

Tarzan, helpless to prevent it, viewed the slaughter in cold anger. He had witnessed the brutality of game-hogs before, but never anything like this. His estimate of man, never any too high, reached nadir. He went out into the plain and mercifully put out of their misery those of the animals which were hopelessly wounded, following the trail of destruction in the direction that the car had taken. Eventually he would come upon the two men again, and there would be an accounting.

Far ahead of him, the survivors of the terrified herd plunged into a rocky gully; and clambering up the opposite side, disappeared over the ridge as Mullargan brought the car to a stop near the bottom.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Was dat sport! When I gets all my heads up on a wall, I'll make that Park Avenue guy look like a piker."

"You sure cleaned 'em up, kid," said Marks. "That was some shootin'."

"I wasn't a expert rifleman in the Marine Corps for nothin', Joey. Now if I could just run into a flock of lions—boy!"

The forest came down into the head of the gorge, and the trees grew thickly to within a hundred yards of the car. There was a movement among the trees there, but neither of the dull-witted men were conscious of it. They had lighted cigars and were enjoying a few moments of relaxation.

"I guess we better start back an' mop up," said Mullargan. "I don't want to lose none of 'em. Say, at this rate I ought to take back about a thousand heads if we put in a full month. I'll sure give them newspaper bums some'n to write about when I get home. I'll have one of them photographer bums take my pitcher settin' on top of a thousand heads—all kinds. That'll get in every newspaper in the U. S."



"It sure will, kid," agreed Marks. "We'll sure give Africa a lot of publicity." As he spoke, his eyes were on the forest up the gorge. Suddenly his brows knitted. "Say, kid, lookit! What's that?"

Mullargan looked, and then cautiously picked up the machine-gun. "S-s-sh!" he cautioned. "That's a elephant. What luck!" He raised the muzzle of the weapon and squeezed the trigger. An elephant trumpeted and lurched out into the open. It was followed by another and another, until seven of the great beasts were coming toward them; then the gun jammed.

"Hell!" exclaimed Mullargan. "They'll get away before I can clear this."

"They aint goin' away," said Marks. "They're comin' for us."

The elephants, poor of eyesight, finally located the car. Their trunks and their great ears went up, as, trumpeting, they charged; but by that time Mullargan had cleared the gun and was pouring lead into them again. One elephant went down. Others wavered and turned aside. It was too much for them—too much for all but one, a great bull, which, maddened by the pain of many wounds, carried the charge home.

The sound of the machine-gun ceased. Mullargan threw the weapon down in disgust. "Beat it, Joey!" he yelled; "the drum's empty."

The two men tumbled over the opposite side of the car as the bull struck it. The weight of the great body, the terrific impact, rolled the car over, wheels up. The bull staggered and lurched forward, falling across the chassis, dead.

The two men came slowly back. "Gee!" said Mullargan. "Look wot he went an' done to that jalopy! Henry wouldn't never recognize it now." He got down on his hands and knees and tried to peer underneath the wreck.

Marks was shaking like an aspen. "Suppose he hadn't of croaked," he said; "where would we of been? Wot we goin' to do now?"

"We gotta wait here until the truck comes. Our guns is all underneath that mess. Maybe the truck can drag the big bum off. We gotta have our guns."

"I wish to Gawd I was back on Broadway," said Marks, sneezing, "where there aint no elephants or no hay."

LITTLE NKIMA was greatly annoyed. In the first place, the blast of the machine-gun had upset him. It had frightened him so badly that he had abandoned the sanctuary of his lord and master's shoulder and scampered to the uttermost pinnacle of a near-by tree. When Tarzan had gone out on the plain, he had followed; and he didn't like it at all out on the plain, because the fierce African sun beat down, and there was no protection. And he was further annoyed because he had continued to hear the nerve-shattering sound intermittently for quite some time, and it came from the direction in which they were going. As he scampered along behind, he scolded his master; for little Nkima saw no sense in looking for trouble in a world in which there was already more than enough looking for you.

Tarzan had heard the sound of the gunning, the squeals of hurt elephants and the trumpeting of angry elephants; and he visualized the brutal tragedy as clearly as though he saw it with his eyes; and his anger rose so that he forgot the law of the white man, for Tantor the elephant was his best friend. It was a wild beast, a killer, that set out at a brisk trot in the direction from which the sounds had come.

The sounds that had come to the ears of Tarzan and the ears of Nkima had come also to other ears in the dense forest beyond the gorge. Their owners were slinking through the shaded gloom on silent, stealthy feet to reconnoiter. They came warily, for they knew the sounds meant white men; and many white men with guns were bad medicine. They hoped that there were not too many.

As Tarzan reached the edge of the gorge and looked down upon the scene below, other eyes looked down from the opposite side.

These other eyes saw Tarzan; but the trees and the underbrush hid them from him, and the wind being at his back, their scent was not carried to his nostrils.

Of the two men in the gorge, Marks was the first to see Tarzan. He called Mullargan's attention to him, and the two men watched the ape-man descending slowly

toward them. Nkima, sensing trouble, remained at the summit, chattering and scolding. Tarzan approached the two men in silence.

"Wot you want?" demanded Mullargan, reaching for the gun at his hip.

"You kill?" asked Tarzan, pointing at the dead elephant, and in his anger, reverting to the monosyllabic grunts which were reminiscent of his introduction to English many years before.

"Yes—so what?" Mullargan's tone was nasty.

"Tarzan kill," said the ape-man, and stepped closer. He was five feet from Mullargan when the latter whipped his pistol from its holster and fired. But quick as Mullargan had been, Tarzan had been quicker. He struck the weapon up, and the bullet whistled harmlessly into the air; then he tore the gun from the other's hand and hurled it aside.

Mullargan grinned, a twisted, sneering grin. The poor boob was pretty fresh, he thought, getting funny like that with the Heavyweight Champion of the World. "So you're dat Tarzan bum," he said; then he swung that lethal right of his straight for Tarzan's chin.

He was much surprised when he missed. He was more surprised when the ape-man dealt him a terrific blow on the side of the head with his open palm, a blow that felled him, half-stunned.

Marks danced about in consternation and terror. "Get up, you bum," he yelled at Mullargan; "get up and kill him."

NKIMA jumped up and down at the edge of the gorge, hurling defiance and insults at the *tarmangani*. Mullargan came slowly to his feet. Instinctively, he had taken a count of nine. Now there was murder in his heart. He rushed Tarzan, and once again the ape-man made him miss; then Mullargan fell into a clinch, pinning Tarzan's right arm and striking terrific blows above one of the ape-man's kidneys, to hurt and weaken him.

With his free hand Tarzan lifted Mullargan from his feet and threw him heavily to the ground, falling on top of him. Steel-thewed fingers sought Mullargan's throat. He struggled to free himself, but he was helpless. A low growl came from the throat of the man upon him. It was the growl of a beast, and it filled the champion with a terror that was new to him.

"Help, Joey! Help!" he cried. "The so-an'-so's killin' me."

Marks was the personification of futility. He could only hop about, screaming: "Get up, you bum; get up and kill him!"

Nkima hopped about too, and screamed; but he hopped and screamed for a very different reason from that which animated Marks, for he saw something that the three men, their whole attention centered on the fight, did not see. He saw a horde of savages coming down out of the forest on the opposite side of the gorge.

The Babangos, realizing that the three men below them were thoroughly engrossed and entirely unaware of their presence, advanced silently, for they wished to take them alive and unharmed. They came swiftly, a hundred sleek warriors, muscled and hard, a hundred splendid refutations of the theory that the eating of human flesh makes men mangy, hairless and toothless.

Marks saw them first, and screamed a warning; but it was too late, for they were already upon him. By the weight of their numbers, they overwhelmed the three men, burying Tarzan and Mullargan beneath a dozen sleek dark bodies; but the ape-man rose, shaking them from him for a moment. Mullargan saw him raise a warrior above his head and hurl him into the faces of his fellows, and the champion was awed by this display of physical strength so much greater than his own.

This momentary reversal was brief—there were too many Babangos even for Tarzan. Two of them seized him around the ankles, and three more bore him backward to the ground; but before they succeeded in binding him, he had killed one with his bare hands.

Mullargan was taken with less difficulty; Marks with none. The Babangos bound their hands tightly behind their backs; and prodding them from behind with their spears, drove them up the steep gorge side into the forest.

Little Nkima watched for a moment; then he fled back across the plain.

THE gloom of the forest was on them, depressing further the spirits of the two Americans. The myriad close-packed trees, whose interlaced crowns of foliage shut out the sky and the sun, awed them. Trees, trees, trees! Trees of all sizes and heights, some raising their loftiest branches nearly two hundred feet above the carpet of close-packed phynia, amoma, and dwarf bush that covered the



"So you're dat Tarzan bum," he said; then he swung that lethal right of his straight for Tarzan's chin. He was much surprised when he missed.

ground. Loops and festoons of lianas ran from tree to tree, or wound like huge serpents around their boles from base to loftiest pinnacle. From the highest branches others hung almost to the ground, their frayed extremities scarcely moving in the dead air; and other, slenderer cords hung down in tassels, with open thread work at their ends, the air roots of the epiphytes.

"Wot you suppose they goin' to do with us?" asked Marks. "Hold us for ransom?"

"Mebbe. I don't know. How'd they collect ransom?"

Marks shook his head. "Then what are they goin' to do with us?"

"Why don't you ask that big bum?" suggested Mullargan, jerking his head in the general direction of Tarzan.

"Bum!" Marks spat the word out disgustedly. "He made a bum outta you, big boy. I wisht I had a bum like that back in Noo York. I'd have a real champeen then. He nearly kayoed you with the flat of his hand. What a hay-maker he packs!"

"Just a lucky punch," said Mullargan. "Might happen to anyone."

"He picks you up like you was a fly-weight; but when he truns you down you land like a heavyweight, all right. I suppose 'at was just luck."

"He aint human. Did you hear him growl? Just like a lion or somep'n."

"I wisht I knew what they was goin' to do with us," said Marks.

"Well, they aint agoin' to kill us. If they was, they would of done it back there when they got us. There wouldn't be no sense in luggin' us somewheres else to kill us."

"I guess you're right, at that."

The footpath that the Babangos followed with their captives wound erratically through the forest. It was scarcely more than eighteen inches wide, a narrow trough worn deep by the feet of countless men and beasts through countless years. It led at last to a rude encampment on the banks of a small stream near its confluence with a larger river. It was the site of an abandoned village in a clearing not yet entirely reclaimed by the jungle.

As the three men were led into the encampment, they were surrounded by yelling women and children. The women spat upon them, and the children threw sticks at them until the warriors drove them off; then, with ropes about their necks, they were tied to a small tree.

Marks, exhausted, threw himself upon the ground; Mullargan sat with his back against the tree; Tarzan remained standing, his eyes examining every detail of his surroundings, his mind centered upon a single subject—escape.

"Cripes," said Marks. "I'm all in."

"You aint never used your dogs enough," said Mullargan, unsympathetically. "You was always keen on me doin' six miles of road work every day while you loafed in a automobile."

"What was that?" suddenly demanded Marks.

"What's what?"

"Don't you hear it—they groans?"

The sound was coming from the direction of the stream, which they could not see because of intervening growth.

"Some smoke's got a bellyache," said Mullargan.

"It sounds awful," said Marks. "I wisht I was back in Gawd's country. You sure had a hell of a bright idea—comin' to this Africa. I wisht I knew what they was goin' to do with us."

Mullargan glanced up at Tarzan. "He aint worryin' none," he said, "and he ought to know what they're goin' to do with us. He's a wild man himself."

They had been speaking in whispers, but Tarzan had heard what they said. "You want to know what they're going to do to you?" he asked.

"We sure do," said Marks.

"They're going to eat you."

Marks sat up suddenly. He felt his throat go dry, and he licked his lips. "Eat us?" he croaked. "You're kiddin', Mister; they aint no cannibals no more, only in movin' pitchers an' story-books."

"No? You hear that moaning coming from the river?"



"Uh-huh."

"That part of it's worse than being eaten."

"What is it?" demanded Marks.

"They're preparing the meat—making it tender. Those are men or women or little children that you hear—there are several of them. Two or three days ago, perhaps, they broke their arms and legs in three or four places with clubs; then they sank them in the river, tying their heads up to sticks; so they can't drown by accident or commit suicide. They'll leave them there three or four days; then they'll cut them up and cook them."

Mullargan turned a sickly yellowish white. Marks rolled over on his side and was sick. Tarzan looked down on them without pity.

"You are afraid," said Tarzan. "You don't want to suffer. Out on the plain and in the forest are the zebra and elephant that you left to suffer, perhaps for many days."

"But they're only animals," said Mullargan. "We're human bein's."

"You are animals," said the ape-man. "You suffer no more than other animals, when you are hurt. I am glad that the Babangos are going to make you suf-

The witch-doctor rose and approached the two victims. Marks struggled and cried out: "Save me, kid! Save me! Don't let 'em do this to me!"



fer before they eat you. You are worse than the Babangos. You had no reason for hurting the zebra and the elephant. You could not possibly have eaten all that you killed. The Babangos kill only for food, and they kill only as much as they can eat. They are better people than you, who will find pleasure in killing."

For a long time the three were silent, each wrapped in his own thoughts. Above the noises of the encampment rose the moans from the river. Marks commenced to sob. He was breaking. Mullargan was breaking too, but with a different reaction.

He looked up at Tarzan, who still stood, impassive, above them. "I been thinkin', Mister," he said, "about what you was sayin' about us hurtin' the animals an' killin' for pleasure. I aint never thought about it that way before. I wisht I hadn't done it."

A LITTLE monkey fled across the hot plain. He made a detour to avoid the lumbering truck following in the wake of the hunters. Shortly thereafter he took to the trees and swung through them close to the edge of the plain. He was a terrified little monkey, constantly on the alert for the many creatures to which monkey meat is an especial delicacy. It was sad that such an ardent nemophilist should be afraid in the forest, but that was because Histah the snake and Sheeta the panther were also

arboreal. There were also large monkeys with very bad dispositions, which it were wise to avoid; so little Nkima traveled as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. It was seldom that he traveled, or did anything else, with such singleness of purpose; but today not even the most luscious caterpillar, the most enticing fruits, or even a nest of eggs could tempt him to loiter. Little Nkima was going places, fast. . . .

Melton saw the carcasses of zebra pointing the way the hunters had gone. He was filled with anger and disgust, and he cursed under his breath. When he came to the edge of the gorge, he saw the wreck of the automobile lying beneath the body of a bull elephant; but he saw no sign of the two men. He got out and went down into the gorge.

MELTON was an experienced tracker. He could read a story in a crushed blade of grass or a broken twig. A swift survey of the ground surrounding the wrecked automobile told him a story that filled him with concern—for himself. With his rifle cocked, he climbed back up the side of the gorge toward the truck, turning his eyes often back toward the forest on the opposite side. It was with a sigh of relief that he turned the truck about and started back across the plain.

"The bounders had it coming to them," he thought. "There's nothing I can do about it but report it, and by that time it will be too late."

That night the Babangos feasted, and Tarzan learned from snatches of their conversation that they were planning to commence the preparation of him and the two Americans the following night; but Tarzan was of no mind to have his arms and legs broken. He lay down close to Mullargan.

"Turn on your side," he whispered. "I am going to lie with my back to yours. I'll try to untie the thongs on your wrists; then you can untie mine."

"Oke," said Mullargan.

Out in the forest toward the plain a lion roared, and the instant reaction of the Babangos evidenced their fear of the king of beasts. They replenished their beast-fires and beat their drums to frighten away the marauder. They were not lion men, these hunters of humans; but after a while, hearing no more from the lion, the savages, once again feasting, dancing, drinking, relaxed their surveillance; and Tarzan was able to labor uninterruptedly for hours. It was slow

work, for his hands were so bound that he could use the fingers of but one of them at a time; but at last one knot gave to his perseverance. After that it was easier, and in another half-hour Mullargan's hands were free. With two hands, he could work more rapidly; but time was flying. It was long past midnight. There were signs that the orgy would soon be terminated; then, Tarzan knew, guards would be placed over them. At last he was free. Marks' bonds responded more easily.

"Crawl on your bellies after me," Tarzan whispered. "Make no noise." Mullargan's admission of his regret for the slaughter of the zebra had determined Tarzan to give the two men a chance to escape—that, and the fact that Mullargan had helped to release him. He felt neither liking nor responsibility for them. He did not consider them as fellow-beings, but as creatures further removed from him than the wild beasts with which he had consorted since childhood: those were his kin and his fellows.

TARZAN inched across the clearing toward the forest. Had he been alone, he would have depended upon his speed to reach the sanctuary of the trees where no Babangos could have followed him along the high-flung pathways that the apes of Kerchak had taught him to traverse; but the only chance that the two behind him had was that of reaching the forest unobserved.

They had covered scarcely more than a hundred feet when Marks sneezed. Asthmatic, he had reacted to some dust or pollen that their movement had raised from the ground. He sneezed, not once but continuously; and his sneezing was answered by shouts from the encampment.

"Get up and run!" directed Tarzan, leaping to his feet; and the three raced for the forest, followed by a horde of yelling savages.

The Babangos overtook Marks first, the result of neglecting his road-work; but they caught Mullargan too, just before he reached the forest. They caught him because he had hesitated momentarily, motivated by what was possibly the first heroic urge of his life, to attempt to rescue Marks. When they were upon him, and both rescue and escape were no longer possible, One-punch Mullargan went berserk.

"Come on, you bums!" he yelled, and planted his famous right on a black chin.

Others closed in on him and went down in rapid succession to a series of vicious rights and lefts. "I'll learn you," growled Mullargan, "to monkey with the Heavy-weight Champeen of the World!" Then a warrior crept up behind him and struck him a heavy blow across his head with the haft of a spear, and One-punch Mullargan went down and out for the first time in his life.

Tarzan, perched upon the limb of a tree at the edge of the clearing, had been an interested spectator, correctly interpreting Mullargan's act of heroism. It was the second admirable trait that he had seen in either of these *tarmangani*, and it moved him to a more active contemplation of their impending fate. Death meant nothing to him, unless it was the death of a friend, for death is a commonplace of the jungle; and his, the psychology of the wild beast, which, walking always with death, is not greatly impressed by it.

But self-sacrificing heroism is not a common characteristic of wild beasts. It belongs almost exclusively to man, marking the more courageous among them. It was an attribute that Tarzan could understand and admire. It formed a bond between these two most dissimilar men, raising Mullargan in Tarzan's estimation above the position held by the Babangos, whom he looked upon as natural enemies. Formerly, Mullargan had ranked below the Babangos, below Ungo the jackal, below Dango the hyena.

Tarzan still felt no responsibility for these men, whom he had been about to abandon to their fate; but he considered the idea of aiding them, perhaps as much to confound and annoy the Babangos as to succor Mullargan and Marks.

ONCE again Nkima crossed the plain, this time upon the broad, brown shoulder of Muviro, chief of the white-plumed Waziri. Once again he chattered and scolded, and his heart was as the heart of Numa the lion. From the shoulder of Muviro, as from the shoulder of Tarzan, Nkima could tell the world to go to hell; and did.

From his slow-moving lorry, Melton saw, in the distance, what appeared to be a large party of men approaching. He stopped the lorry and reached for his binoculars.

When he had focused them on the object of his interest, he whistled.

"I hope they're friendly," he thought. One of his boys had told him that the



The lion was above Mullargan before he could gain his feet. Tarzan launched himself from the tree upon the great cat.

Babangos were raiding somewhere in this territory, and the evidence he had seen around the wrecked automobile seemed to substantiate the rumor. He saw that the boy beside him had his rifle in readiness, and drove on again.

When they were closer, he saw that the party consisted of some hundred white-plumed warriors. They had altered their course so as to intercept him. He thought of speeding up the truck and running through them. The situation looked bad to him, for this was evidently a war

party. He called to the boys on top of the load to get out the extra rifles and to commence firing if he gave the word.

"Do not fire at them, Bwana," said on of the boys; "they would kill us all if you did. They are very great warriors."

"Who are they?" asked Melton.

"The Waziris. They will not harm us.

It was Muviro who stepped into the path of the truck and held up his hand. Melton stopped.

"Where have you come from?" asked the Waziri chief.

Melton told him of the gorge and what he had found in its bottom.

"You saw no other white men than your two friends?" asked Muviro.

"Yesterday, I saw a white man who called himself Tarzan."

"Was he with the others when they were captured?"

"I do not know."

"Follow us," said Muviro, "and camp at the edge of the forest. If your friends are alive, we will bring them back."

NKIMA'S actions had told Muviro that Tarzan was in trouble, and this new evidence suggested that he might have been killed or captured by the same tribe that had surprised the other men.

Melton watched the Waziri swing away at a rapid trot that would eat up the miles rapidly; then he started his motor and followed. . . .

At the cannibal encampment, the Babangos, sleeping off the effects of their orgy, were not astir until nearly noon. They were in an ugly mood. They had lost one victim, and many of them were nursing sore jaws and broken noses as a result of their encounter with One-punch Mullargan.

The white men were not in much better shape: Mullargan's head ached, while Marks ached all over; and every time he thought of what lay in store for him before they would kill him, he felt faint.

"They breaks our arms and legs in four places," he mumbled, "an' then they soaks us in the drink for three days to make us tender. The dirty bums!"

"Shut up!" snapped Mullargan. "I been tryin' to forget it."

Tarzan, knowing that the Waziri were not far behind him, returned to the edge of the plain to look for them. Alone, and in broad daylight, he knew that not even he could hope to rescue the Americans from the camp of the Babangos. All day he loitered at the edge of the plain; and then, there being no sign of the Waziri, he swung back through the trees toward the cannibal encampment as the brief equatorial twilight ushered in the impenetrable darkness of the forest night.

He approached the camp from a new direction, coming down the little stream in which the remaining victims were still submerged. Above the camp, his nostrils caught the scent of Numa the lion and Sabor the lioness; and presently he made out their dim forms below him. They were slinking silently toward the scent of human flesh, and they were ravenously

hungry. The ape-man knew this, for the scent of an empty lion is quite different from that of one with a full belly. Every wild beast knows this; so that it is far from unusual to see lions that have recently fed pass through a herd of grazing herbivores without eliciting more than casual attention.

The silence and hunger of these two stalking lions boded ill for their intended prey.

A dozen warriors approached Mullargan and Marks. They cut their bonds and jerked the two men roughly to their feet; then they dragged them to the center of the camp, where the chief and the witch-doctor sat beneath a large tree. Warriors stood in a semi-circle facing the chief, and behind them were the women and children.

The two Americans were tripped and thrown to the ground upon their backs; and there they were spread-eagled, two warriors pinioning each arm and leg. From the foliage of the tree above, an almost naked white man looked down upon the scene. He was weighing in his mind the chances of effecting a rescue, but he had no intention of sacrificing himself uselessly for these two. Beyond the beast-fires two pairs of yellow-green unblinking eyes watched. The tips of two sinuous tails weaved to and fro. A pitiful moan came from the stream near by; and the lioness turned her eyes in that direction, but the great black-maned male continued to glare at the throng within the encampment.

The witch-doctor rose and approached the two victims. In one hand he carried a zebra's tail, to which feathers were attached in the other a heavy club. Marks saw him and commenced to whimper. He struggled and cried out:

"Save me, kid! Save me! Don't let 'em do this to me!"

MULLARGAN muttered a half-remembered prayer. The witch-doctor began to dance around them, waving the zebra's tail over them and mumbling his ritualistic mumbo-jumbo. Suddenly he leaped in close to Mullargan and swung his heavy club above the pinioned man; then Mullargan, Heavyweight Champion of the World, tore loose from the grasp of the warriors and leaped to his feet. With all the power of his muscles and the weight of his body, he drove such a blow to the chin of the witch-doctor as he had never delivered in any ring; and the witch-doctor went down and out with a

broken jaw. A shout of savage rage went up from the assembled warriors, and a moment later Mullargan was submerged by numbers.

THE lioness approached the edge of the stream and stretched a taloned paw toward the head of one of the Babangos' pitiful victims, a woman. The poor creature screamed in terror, and the lioness growled horribly and struck. The Babangos, terrified, turned their eyes in the direction of the sounds; and then the lion charged straight for them, his thunderous roar shaking the ground. The savages turned and fled, leaving their two victims and the witch-doctor in the path of the carnivore.

It all happened so quickly that the lion was above Mullargan before he could gain his feet. For a moment the great beast stood glaring down at the prostrate man, who lay paralyzed with fright, staring back into those terrifying eyes. He smelled the fetid breath and saw the yellow fangs and the drooling jowls, and he saw something else—something that filled him with wonder and amazement—as Tarzan launched himself from the tree full upon the back of the great cat.

Mullargan leaped to his feet then and backed away, but was held by fascinated horror as he waited for the lion to kill the man. Marks scrambled up and tried to climb the tree, clawing at the great bole in a frenzy of terror. The lioness had dragged the woman from the stream and was carrying her off into the forest, her agonized screams rising above all other sounds.

Mullargan wished to run away, but he could not. He stood fixed to the ground, watching the incredible. Tarzan's legs were locked around the small of the lion's body, his steel-thewed arms encircling the black-maned neck. The lion reared upon his hind feet, striking futilely at the man-thing upon his back; and mingled with his roaring and his growling were the growls of the man. It was the latter which froze Mullargan's blood.

He saw the lion throw himself to the ground and roll over upon the man in a frantic effort to dislodge him, but when he came to his feet again the man was still there. One-punch Mullargan had witnessed many a battle that had brought howls of approval for the strength or courage of the contestants, but never had he seen such strength and courage as were being displayed by this almost naked man in hand-to-hand battle with a lion.

The endurance of a lion is in no measure proportional to its strength, and presently the great cat commenced to tire. For a moment it stood squarely upon all four feet, panting; and in that first moment of opportunity Tarzan released his hold with one hand and drew his hunting-knife from its scabbard. At the movement, the lion wheeled and sought to seize his antagonist. The knife flashed in the firelight and the long blade sank deep behind the tawny shoulder. Voicing a hideous roar, the beast reared and leaped; and again the blade was driven home. In a paroxysm of pain and rage, the great cat leaped high into the air. Again the blade was buried in its side. Three times the point had reached the lion's heart; and at last it rolled over on its side, quivered convulsively and lay still.

Tarzan sprang erect and placed a foot upon the carcass of his kill, and raising his face to the heavens voiced the hideous victory cry of the bull ape. Marks' knees gave beneath him, and he sat down suddenly. Mullargan felt the hairs on his scalp rise. The Babangos, who had run into the forest to escape the lion, kept on running to escape the nameless horror of the weird cry.

"Come!" commanded Tarzan; and led the two men toward the plain—away from captivity and death and the cannibal Babangos.

NEXT day, Marks and Mullargan were in camp with Melton. Tarzan and the Waziri were preparing to leave in pursuit of the Babangos, to punish them and drive them from the country.

Before the ape-man left, he confronted the two Americans.

"Get out of Africa," he commanded, "and never come back."

"Never's too damn' soon for me," said Mullargan.

"Listen, Mister," said Marks. "I'll guarantee you one hundred G. if you'll come back to Noo York an' fight for me."

Tarzan turned and walked away, joining the Waziri, who were already on the march. Nkima sat upon his shoulder and called the *tarmangani* vile names.

Marks spread his hands, palms up. "Can you beat it, kid?" he demanded. "He turns down one hundred G. cold! But it's a good thing for you he did—he'd have taken that championship away from you in one round."

"Who?" demanded One-punch Mullargan. "Dat bum?"



Warlock Finn

The Finns, as witness this fine story, are fey, warlock—possessed of almost supernatural gifts. Certainly they have what it takes—and then some. They themselves have a word for it: sisu. According to Nurmi, as quoted by Hudson Strode in the New York Times: "Sisu is patience and strong will without passion; it comes to men miraculously in times of stress."

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

KURT AKONEN flushed angrily as roars of laughter swept up among the white birch trees. Captain Vikoski, who was waxing his skis, looked up with a grin on his wizened, wrinkled features.

"Brother Kurt, we know America is a wonderful place, but you can't expect us to believe downright lies, if you'll pardon the word. We don't wish to be offensive. You've come from America to aid us, your own people by blood; we respect you. And we Finns like a joke—but it must be told as a joke, brother, not as sober truth!"

"Damn it, it is the truth!" blurted out

Kurt Akonen. "I tell you, I worked on that assembly-line myself!"

"And you saw a piece of steel start at one end, and finish at the other end a perfect motor-car?" And Captain Vikoski grinned anew. "Now I'll tell one, brother. Last year, before the war started, a whale was washed up on the beach; an old whale, dead. When we cut him up, what do you think we found, grown into his jawbone? A long extra piece of bone, put there long ago, carved with Hebrew characters! The bishop said they made the word *Jonah*. Therefore, this was the whale that had swallowed Jonah the prophet, ages back."



"Yes! That's true!" went up a sober murmur, brown faces nodding gravely, pipes all puffing. Kurt looked around. He knew these men from the backwoods, from the desolate empty tundras along the Arctic coast, not educated city men; to them, his tales of marvels in the United States were hard of credence. But this whale story—

Suddenly the grave, wrinkled faces broke in a glint, Kurt saw the thin lips twitch, and he himself was the first to laugh aloud, as the roar went up. Captain Vikoski clapped an arm about his shoulders.

"Brother, each man has his own value! You can handle explosives; that is good. That's why we're here, with the battery and wire; no one else here knows it. But we know skis, we know the forest and the border trails into Russia, we know rifles and we have a machine-gun. Good! What's more," and the Captain winked elaborately, "all the ghosts and the ancient spells of Finland are working for us and helping us! Everybody knows a Finn is a wizard. Did not the English Kipling—if I am not mistaken—refer to a Warlock Finn?"

"That's what they say, anyhow," said Kurt Akonen. "And now more than ever, since we're beating off the Russ!"

"Ah! But look!" Captain Vikoski, the shrewd old fox, laid a finger along his nose. "How do we beat them? Like

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

this. Forty men here, good men, hard men. We go into Russia, and we die there, after we do our job. So what? We kill many Russians, but forty Finns are dead. Plenty more Russians, but no more Finns. Help is coming, sure, but not enough. These Russians coming up to Murmansk are crack troops, the very best."

"So much the better if we smash them!" cried Kurt, and there was a hum of approval. They all liked this American who had returned to the land of his fathers. Kurt felt this and warmed to it. These simple men were his own kind.

He himself, brought up in America, graduating from the assembly-line to the sales force, hard, severe, brilliant of promise, then going on as a ski champion and trainer—finally to end all the old life and come back here to Finland, with a thousand more of his countrymen. And here, with his intelligence and hard rugged frame and expert skis, he was valuable: Second in command to Vikoski, now—Vikoski of the suicide troops.

A distant horn was heard, afar in the night-dark forest. Vikoski looked up.

"Ready, everyone? The orders are coming. When we break camp, you know what to expect. The extra men will take back the horses and sleds."



"What do you think?" asked Vikoski. "I think he's lying," said Akonen.

A stir spread through the birches. Skis, packs and guns were made ready; everything was perfectly ordered. Here Kurt had been of value, too. His eyes glittered proudly at the men around him: ready for any emergency, supplied against everything—except failure.

Furs were ready. White parkas were ready, to make the men invisible against the snow.

For it was bitter sub-zero weather, the trees crackling in the intense frost. Now

the horn sounded again, closer. Presently a voice rose. Snow crackled under skis, and a man came, staggering, exhausted, collapsing. Captain Vikoski took the dispatch from him, and everyone gathered around.

There were no secrets here, and scant discipline; all were brothers.

"An entire Russian division, the 93rd, one of their crack divisions is *en route* to Murmansk," said Captain Vikoski. "Our job is to destroy them."

Someone laughed. "Forty men destroy eighteen thousand?"

"Certainly." Vikoski's wedge-shaped features beamed. "Cut the railroad, that's all; make a thorough job of it. That division is then cut off in the north and our troops can chop them up at will. Specifically, we must cut the railroad before an armored train goes north tomorrow evening. That train must be stopped. It contains artillery and all ammunition for the 93rd, and their chief officers and staff. We must give ourselves, brethren, in order that a division of the enemy may perish."

"No use talking like an orator," growled someone. "Let's go and do it."

A burst of laughter rang up. Vikoski grinned and blew his whistle, and orders flew; Vikoski leading, the forty moved out to destroy the eighteen thousand.

IT was like nothing Kurt Akonen had ever felt or known. Ahead was a fifty-odd-mile march through darkness, desolation, enemy territory; at the end of this march, deep in old Russia, death was waiting. Yet these men sang, talked of the past and the future, glistened with the joyous Finnish spirit, hard and bright as Finnish nickel from the northern mines.

They joked and laughed as their skis streaked the snow; not one doubted their ability to fulfill the orders. Some, perhaps, would survive to get back home again—not many. Yet the burning curiosity was how the American would manage his own work. Here in the Arctic woods, experts with explosives were few; those of the company who knew, had been killed off. There were loads of gelignite and dynamite and electrical equipment—sheer luxury, since caps and fuses would do, yet carried for a definite reason. And Kurt Akonen to handle all.

The grim, hard pace was very different from the fancy skiing and Immelmans of Sun Valley or the Adirondacks. Kurt buckled down to the slogging march; fifty miles of this, with scarcely any down grades, was a killing business.

"Snow is ahead," said a voice; and Vikoski swung in beside him. "There were sundogs yesterday. Snow will be fine for us; no Soviet planes! A dozen of our men will fall out before we're halfway there; however, they'll catch up later."

"Fall out? Why?"

"They have some of those fancy Swedish skis, donated with other supplies by the Swedes. Good, but not made for this heavy cross-country work. You'll see!

By morning, our men will curse the Swedes, and rest."

"I may hold you up myself," Kurt said honestly. "Those practice marches showed that I'm far from being your equal."

The Captain laughed softly, as though amused by this.

"Oh, no! The ghosts of the dead are helping you, brother. We fight against destruction; we are helped."

Kurt grunted. "I don't take any stock in all that nonsense, Captain. I've heard the talk about warlock Finns all my life and it doesn't register with me. Doesn't take any wizardry to foretell snow and wind tomorrow; anyone with half an eye for sky and air and the feel of things could tell that much. I'm a good Christian, Vikoski, so keep all your occult stuff to yourself and pray that the caps and fuses remain dry."

"Oh, we're all good Christians, brother! Wait and see. Maybe we perish, maybe Finland will perish; only for a while. This is one of three magic countries in Europe where the spells of ancient ages lie sleeping. Hungary is one, and Provence is the third. Maybe the Russians will break us and go on, maybe not. You will be helped, because you are a Finn and have come home from America to fight for Finland."

"Another version of the gods help those who help themselves, eh?" grunted Kurt.

Captain Vikoski laughed. "Perhaps, perhaps! Now we must quicken pace and send the scouts far ahead. No more loafing."

"Loafing!" thought Kurt. "He's crazy, like all Finns. I was crazy myself, to give up a good job at home and come back to Finland!"

YET it was remarkable how good he felt, despite the increasing fatigue; a feeling from inside, a sensation of spiritual exhilaration. The entire column felt the same way—and Akonen wondered at these men, knowing how some of them had lost sons or brethren or whole families in the first Russian advance. They had accomplished, and were accomplishing, feats of incredible endurance, shattering the long Russian line from south to north, fighting day and night with superhuman energy; and if they died, at least they had something worth dying for. This was more than the serried armies of Russia could say.

Kurt Akonen had come to fight for the land of his fathers. Others poured in by

the thousands to fight for liberty. The world was sending aid—and Kurt knew now how desperately useless it all was. He knew this, since coming to Finnish soil; he had learned it here. Help could not come in time. Most of it could not get here at all, due to closed frontiers.

SOME of them spoke of this when the brief halt came. Kurt joined a knot of them; they ate, and drank hot coffee, and smoked, while scouts were being sent well ahead and wearied muscles were given a breathing-spell.

"We'll do what we can," said one, a grim man who had lost two sons and a brother in the first fighting before Ivalo. "Those who are dead, still fight on; we'll do the same. One free fighter is worth a thousand slaves, my brothers."

Eloquence, thought Kurt Akonen. All very well, and quite sincere; none the less, fine words left him cold. He was ready to do his bit, and was doing it, but would far sooner have been back home with his wife and child. He admitted it freely when someone asked him.

"Sure. Why not? But there's my old man. There's my wife, and the kid. All fed up on Finland stuff—stories, music, so on. My old man was in the revolution against Russia. So what? I've got to come over and do my bit, or they'll think I'm a hell of a Finn! And when you come right down to brass tacks, there's my self-respect, too."

The others grinned at this, and Captain Vikoski slapped him on the back.

"Truth sounds good, brother. You'll see! You'll be helped; the gods will make use of you—"

"Never mind that nonsense," broke in Akonen, irritated. "It's all right up to a certain point; then it gets absurd. Forget it! Just what's your program?"

"Keep marching. Halt tomorrow noon; we'll be within striking distance of the railroad, at the trestle near the Bogun lake. That's so far from the border that they'll expect no enemy; none the less, it will be guarded. We must wait, hidden. Evening will not be long distant. Then we strike. That trestle is no more than a bridge across the swamp; if we blow out the supports upholding it, the damage will be severe. Merely burning it would effect little. But it will be hard to replace these supports."

"Fine," agreed Akonen. "Dynamite strikes downward! And after it's done?"

Vikoski grinned. "Separate, and make for the border—those who can!"

The whistle blew; they were up and off again, striking now through trackless timberlands. Past the frontier, in Russia, said someone, but with a long way to go. During the previous day a Finn pursuit plaine had reconnoitered the terrain, sketchily; Vikoski was forced to depend upon this very scanty information, but he and his men knew the country itself like a book, and the railroad line could be scouted when the time came.

A fitful flare of lights played in the north; not many nor strongly, for clouds were massed along the sky, and these lights were little more than reflections. Enough to let Kurt Akonen watch for the trees and brush, however. The party had shrunk; he counted no more than a score of men now. Half had gone on, far on and to the flanks, as vanguard—the hardiest men, these, who could stand the extra stress and speed of scouting.

VIKOSKI came up beside the American recruit.

"Now tell me," he said, "about that gelignite, in case anything happens to you. We did have some fellows from the mines, who were used to explosives, but they didn't return last trip. Of course, we can set a cap and a fuse, if it comes to that; but it'll be much better if we use this electrical equipment of yours. That battery's heavy; it must be good!"

They were like children, thought Akonen, and wondered at the man. Such marvels in the forest, in the wilderness, such incredible rifle-shots, yet in some ways so simple! In laying ground mines, in using artillery, in handling that Swedish mechanical masterpiece, the Bofors anti-aircraft gun, these Finns had an uncanny skill. Yet among them were to be found men like Vikoski, from the far back woods or the tundras or the Arctic shores, who were like men from some earlier generation.

Akonen told of the simple electrical equipment and detonators, for use with either the gelignite or the dynamite—really varying names for the same explosive. The wires and battery formed a weighty and actually needless part of the loads, but had been brought along for just one reason. Vikoski and his men, hearing Kurt Akonen's stories, wanted with all their hearts to see a switch thrown and a Russian troop-train blown up; they would even risk almost certain death for such a sight.

"We've always touched off a fuse and run," said the Captain. "No fun in that

—a quick raid, a few shots, the track blown up here and there, and a fast getaway. No! This time we'll pick our place and time, eh? There'll be shooting enough, after the train is blown up!"

Children—wanted to see a train blown up! Kurt Akonen made no protest, however. He wanted to see it, too. He had something of the same strain in himself. And he knew that if these men were as children, they could also be terrible in the hour of battle. . . .

Hour after hour, unrelenting, merciless, the pace was kept up. The bitter wind had died; the cold was somewhere around thirty below. Akonen moved on mechanically, sustained by sheer will. He saw that Vikoski's prediction had come true; many of the men, equipped with those Swedish sporting skis, had fallen out. Then sounded the whistle, and the Captain's welcome words:

"Fall out. One-hour halt."

Kurt dropped where he stood, once his skis were off. Before he closed his eyes, it seemed, Vikoski was shaking him awake, stifling his protests with eager voice.

"The hour's up, brother; something's happened. We need you. A prisoner is here. His Russian is very bad; he's an American like you. We may have to shoot him and go on, unless you can talk with him. Here, drink this coffee."

KURT AKONEN sat up, swigged the hot drink, ate the cheese and bread, and stared at the group ten feet away. A little fire had been built, lighting them clearly. The prisoner had been found on skis, claiming to be a Russian deserter; the scouts had brought him in.

More likely a spy, affirmed Vikoski, heading for the frontier and Finland. He wore no uniform, but heavy furs. He had money, a lot of money, Finnish and English; an American passport, and a flashlight. It was one of those heavy French flashlights that needs no batteries but generates its own power. He was quite unarmed.

"If a deserter, how did he get these clothes and money?" Vikoski demanded, simplicity itself. "You talk to him."

Akonen joined the group, took a twig from the fire, and held it over his pipe-bowl. The glow struck the harsh, lean curves of his face alight. The prisoner's voice exclaimed:

"Kurt! Kurt Akonen, or I'm a Dutchman! Remember me, Kurt?"

Akonen stared and shook his head.



The voice was vaguely familiar; the bearded face was not, nor the bold, bulging black eyes. The man laughed and spoke again.

"You can't help but remember me! I was next you on the assembly-line for three months. Pete Babenks, remember? I lent you a five-spot, that time your kid was sick, just before I went over to the pressed-steel plant."

"Oh! I got you now, sure," said Kurt. He regarded Babenks stolidly, unsmiling and thoughtful. The man had been a union organizer, or something. Intelligent, able, bold, unscrupulous, a troublemaker. A good workman to be rid of, always talking revolution.

"Think of it—you and me, both from Detroit, meeting up like this!" exclaimed Babenks eagerly.

"I am," said Kurt Akonen, and puffed his pipe alight.

"Well, aren't you going to tell 'em I'm okay? Come on, speak up for me!"

"You speak," replied Akonen, without emotion. The circle of eyes was watching him. Upon him was the responsibil-



ity of life or death for this prisoner. "That was two years ago when I knew you. Now talk fast or you'll get shot. And tell the truth."

"I got nothing to hide, sure! And gosh, it's good to hear real talk again! I don't sling the Russian so good," Babenks said fervently. "I come over here last May, to manage a tractor and tank factory. Things sort of went sour. Then I couldn't send any money home—I'd left the family in Detroit, see? Then I couldn't get out o' Russia myself, even with my American passport. At last this war showed up and they popped me into the army as an officer of the tank-repair corps.

"I've been all ready to skip out," Babenks went on earnestly. "Got clothes and cash together. Then came the chance, when our train broke down. I grabbed my money and clothes and beat it for the frontier. I stole these skis from the bridge guards, where we broke down."

"Yeah? I tried to pay back that five-spot but couldn't get your address," said Kurt Akonen.

"Oh, hell! Forget it, Kurt. I got plenty in my roll here; take a hundred more and enjoy life. All I want is to reach the frontier and get out o' Russian reach, see?"

KURT AKONEN, puffing at his pipe, translated the story briefly.

"And what do you think of it?" asked Vikoski.

"I think he's lying," said Akonen.

"Why?"

"Just a hunch, Captain. And he tried to bribe me with some of his money. Back in America, he was a Soviet agent. Maybe he still is. I think he's a liar."

"Maybe. He's not the first to get fed up and quit," said Vikoski. "No use shooting him if he's really a deserter; use him, instead. What kind of boots is he wearing?"

The boots of Babenks were brushed clear of snow. Russian army boots. Vikoski thought it substantiated the man's story. Kurt shrugged and was not sure.

"Ask where his train broke down," demanded Vikoski, frowning indecisively.

"Near some frozen swamps or lakes," Babenks replied. He was stowing away his money and his heavy flashlight again; they had been returned to him. "I don't remember the name. There was a long bridge, and an emergency landing-field for planes."

"Ha! A trestle!" cried out Vikoski. "Our same one, brother! Ask him!"

Babenks shook his head, when Kurt Akonen translated the word.

"Not what we'd call a trestle at home, Kurt. Not much! Just a series of bridges, like, over swamps. There are guards there, too. And the planes can land. You know, every train has an escort that flies ahead, and also armored cars, because the Finns have raided the line so often. And they've got relays of machine-guns, now—"



The forty moved out to destroy the eighteen thousand.

Kurt Akonen swung toward Captain Vikoski with a swift burst of words, translating what Babenks had just said and then going on rapidly:

"Captain, I still think the man's lying; I think he was heading into Finland on a spy's errand, perhaps on sabotage. The fact that he's not a Russian would help him tremendously, of course. But right now, he can help us! Evidently they've got this trestle or series of bridges heavily guarded. This Babenks knows every detail. He knows the spot. The troops or officers there would know him. If we take him along—"

"Ha! You are an angel!" Vikoski caught Akonen in both arms, embraced him wildly, swung on the prisoner and aimed hand and finger at him. "You! Be shot here, or go with us and help us and prove your story! Choose!"

"What's he yammering out?" demanded Babenks, staring at the wedge-shaped face of the Finn, and the pointing finger. Kurt explained. Babenks hesitated; then his teeth gleamed in a wide grin, and he caught Vikoski's extended hand, then seized Akonen's fist.

"Shake, shake all around!" said he heartily. "You bet! I'll be tickled pink to get in a crack at those Ruskies my own self! It's a go, you bet!"

Five minutes later the whistle blew and they were on their way. Vikoski, with avid curiosity, wanted all details of that spot on the railroad; Babenks talked readily, gladly. Akonen trans-

lated. The three of them kept together. The information was invaluable; details of the Soviet flights along the line and over the adjacent forests, searching for raiders, and details of the trains themselves, and the forces moving up to Murmansk for the new offensive against the Finns in the north.

STILL, Kurt Akonen doubted. True he gradually warmed to the man. It was good, after all, to see someone from home; and, laughing, he made Babenks confirm his tale of a piece of steel at one end of the belt which became an automobile at the finish. Babenks was cordial, intimate, confidential with all sorts of information. Without his account of Soviet precautions, the raid must have failed dismally. Now it would succeed beyond all expectations.

Toward dawn, one of the scouts who had originally picked up Babenks joined the party. All was well, snow was imminent, the day would be gray and gloomy. Akonen talked with the scout and probed deeply. Apparently Pete Babenks had told the truth. His ski-tracks had come from the railroad line, approximately from the point he had said, alone. There was no earthly reason to doubt him, and certainly he could not have expected to run into any Finn raiders. His information was a godsend to them.

And yet—Kurt Akonen doubted. There was a daybreak halt, for food and to-



bacco and hot drinks. Akonen joined Babenks and Captain Vikoski; and Babenks, who was weary enough by this time, jerked his head toward the officer.

"Tell him to watch out for planes. Before any snowstorm, now, they're searching the forests widely—not just along the railroad, but over toward the border, this way. Using a big flight of planes on it, to clear out any raiders."

This was valuable news, and Vikoski sent word on to the scouts. As they talked, there was no point in keeping the plans from Babenks; when he learned that they meant to attack the line this coming night, he dissented vigorously.

"Listen, Kurt, beat that notion out of his head! That's what the Russkies want. Your boys did that last time, and now they'll catch hell. Any night-attack brings out some specially equipped planes with flares and gas-bombs; if the gas doesn't get you, the machine-guns will."

Captain Vikoski thought this over, then nodded vigorously and grinned.

"Tell him we believe him, Akonen, and say no more. No use letting him know too much. He said the armored train

we're after will be along late this afternoon. Good! Shall we let this fellow go or take him along? Can't spare any men to go back with him."

"Take him along," said Kurt Akonen harshly. "I'm the one responsible; if he's lied to us, shoot him! Otherwise he can get away, if and as we get away."

Pete Babenks accepted his situation without protest. On skis, he was superb; he had been a skier from boyhood, he said. His stalwart, athletic figure held up well, too. Kurt Akonen to whom each hour was now an agony, envied him that powerful body of steel.

The man's warnings bore fruit. Twice, before the snow began to sift down steadily, planes appeared circling close over the valleys and forests. The orders were imperative, and were obeyed instantly; stop, scatter, remain immobile! The white parkas showed nothing to the eyes above. Snow over the skis hid them. Provided there was no movement, any scattered group would remain unseen by the searching planes; and so, indeed, it proved.

Snow began to sift down. There was little wind; presently the air was filled with snow. They would be working to clear the railroad track, said Pete Babenks; crews and snow-plows from Murmansk, the base at Khem, and other points would be out. The line must be kept open at all costs.

NO delay now. The stragglers had caught up; each man was accounted for. The scouts began to be overtaken. All clear ahead. The dozen men in the lead would pick a spot for the camp and send back word. It became a dogged, furious slogging, with all hands close to exhaustion, yet carried on by a wild exaltation to superhuman effort. The brief hours of daylight were gloomed by clouds and snow; only the watches told when noon approached. A scout awaited them. All clear. A hollow, barely half a mile from the trestle, as Vikoski persisted in calling it, had been located. Good cover, too, in case the snow ceased.

To Kurt Akonen, that last hour was sheer torture. He was unaware of anything around him; he set his will-power and held to the task. Iron-hard as he was, these Finns were even harder. At the end he was staggering blindly, and when the word came, he just dropped. But he had won through, pack and all!

He wakened to tingling effort. No fires, of course; somewhere, over a secure-

ly hidden fire, tea had been brewed. He was being rubbed, aching muscles flexed; man by man, the same treatment was handed out. Then an hour of delicious sleep.

Then Vikoski wakened him to action.

"Come on," said the Finn, his wedge-shaped face aglow. "You and I, brother! Let the others sleep."

GUARDS were on watch; the others slept. Babenks snored lustily.

Kurt and the captain donned skis and set forth, snow still falling. Through trees, on to a vantage-point; they settled down, side by side, binoculars out. And there was the goal ahead. Kurt thrilled to the sight of it, and his weariness departed.

The railroad line had been cleared; as they watched, a snow-plow came along, keeping it clear, and passed. To the left, the snow covered all sign of marsh or lake or ice; half a dozen piers supported the long bridges. Akonen scanned them closely. He could see two widely separated huts or sheds, snow-covered, spouting smoke from fires within.

"No guards," he commented. "Shiftless soldiering, Vikoski! I'm game to try it."

"No hurry," said the Finn, and chuckled. "There's a plane, to the right."

So Babenks had said. The plane was there, covered by tarpaulins, on an expanse of smooth, wind-swept snow; farther to the right, a hundred yards from the plane, was another shed or barracks whence smoke streamed up; not a guard, not a gun, in sight.

"They may be on guard inside, watching," said Vikoski. "Any guns are certainly inside. Wait an hour; then it will be growing dark. That armored train will certainly be late, too; all Russian trains are late. Ha! Look! Down flat—careful!"

A plane was roaring through the snow-filled air. Behind sounded the far whistle of a locomotive. The plane circled over the bridge, headed back; the train was coming on. The huts disgorged Russian soldiers who stood about, waiting. The train came along from the south, and a breath of relief escaped Vikoski.

"Not the train we expect; another."

A troop-train, this one, swaying and rumbling, coaches crammed with men, white with snow, everything closed. It rattled over the bridges and was gone, on the long eastward curve, and was lost in the falling snow. The plane roared

back, close to earth, then turned and went on anew after the train.

"Keeping good watch, eh?" Vikoski sat up. The soldiers were back in their huts again. "Now to plan. First, can you use the electric battery?"

"Yes. Not for all those spans—we've not enough wire. For two of them, perhaps. Say, those two central ones; we can hide between them and set off the dynamite for both. On the other piers, we'll have to use fuses. But I think we can set the charges for those two piers, unperceived, unless they send out sentries."

"All right," said Vikoski. "Then do it. If you're discovered, we'll give up the effort to catch a train, and go in at 'em. If not, we'll wait. Hm! The machine-gun for that barracks at the landing-field . . . two men to burn the plane . . . parties of each of those huts along the line of trestle."

A guard joined them, was left on watch, and they returned to the camp. All the men, except Pete Babenks, were astir; they left him snoring on, utterly exhausted.

Captain Vikoski gave Akonen six men, and set about instructing the others in their various positions and duties. The light machine-gun was put together, the ammunition belts prepared, grenades and bombs unpacked, rifles readied. Akonen, with his six men, got his own outfit in shape for use. Vikoski came over to him; darkness was upon them.

"Ready? The snow's thinning out; too bad. We'll be covering you, in case you're discovered. Sorry I can't be with you. Good luck, brother!"

He shook hands gravely. Akonen pointed to Pete Babenks.

"What about him?"

"Oh, he'll sleep!" The Finn shrugged. "One of the men is sick and vomiting; I'll leave him to keep an eye on that fellow. He can do us no harm now, anyway. Worried?"

Kurt Akonen shook his head slowly. "No; just a hunch. We have something to fight for, Vikoski. Maybe he has a cause, too! He'd be dangerous."

"Maybe; if he has, then a rifle will finish him."

THE squads were moving out. Because of the deep snow, skis must be used all the time, to the railroad line itself. Kurt and his six men filed off. A last hurried admonition from the Captain: If by any chance the armored train came

from the south, then drop all else, set a quick fuse to a few sticks, and blow out the track anywhere. That train had to be stopped, if nothing else were stopped!

Akonen assented and went on. Voices pursued him and his men in hearty farewell; theirs was the ticklish errand. On and on, keeping to cover wherever possible, until the final dash out to the selected spot. No guards, no sentries were in sight; darkness drifted down but the snow was ceasing, and this was too bad.

Now came the last pause and a keen scrutiny of the huts. Lighted windows showed, but there was no sign of men outside. Akonen gave the word, and struck out across the open. The six men spread afar, white parkas covering them, ready for an alarm and a burst of shots at any instant.

Nothing happened. They came to the long bridge-span, left the skis, scrambled to the roadbed.

Incredulous of this good luck and fired with swift excitement, Kurt stood with two men at one end of the span, the other four men going to the far end. No alarm. They worked fast, but with care. The explosive was set and tamped, the connections were made, the coils of wire were strung out. And, beneath the night-deepening skies, all remained quiet.

Now it proved there was more wire than had been supposed, and Kurt Akonen was delighted by the discovery. Instead of taking his post between those two blasts, he was able to run the wire back, away from the line, to a little copse of brush that had probably marked a swamp-island before the ice and snow came down. It was a hundred feet from the railroad; not much, but enough. Whoever closed the switch, must take his chance.

As the work finished, Akonen sent back the men, all save one. He made a good job of the matter, emboldened by the absence of any alarm, and covered the wires with snow the full length. He had just finished this and was returning to the copse, when his remaining man clucked with alarm. Akonen joined him.

"Sentries—careful!"

THEY lay in the snow, motionless. From the huts were coming men, who bore flashlights. It was a routine business, apparently; they did not leave the track, but walked along, smoking, laughing, talking, until they met. Then they exchanged a few sentences, separated, came back to their huts.



The train was coming to a halt,

"I'm going back to see the Captain," said Akonen to his men. "You wait here; if a train comes from the south before I return, press the plunger. If not, do nothing."

The man assented.

Akonen stroked out for the trees. Luckily, those sentries had been careless, had seen no ski-tracks—had not even looked off the roadbed, apparently.

"We're in luck." Akonen finding the Captain, pointed to the north, where lights were dancing in the sky. "No more chance of hiding, once the fun begins. If you want to blow up the train yourself, why not come over to that copse of trees and do it?"

Captain Vikoski wiped his long nose, and sighed.

"Brother, it is my heart's desire! But there must be an officer in charge here. You stay here, give the word and the signal—a shot in the air—and I'll go."

"Done. I thought the explosion was to be the signal?"

"Certainly. Only, in case something goes wrong first, in case we're discovered—then give the signal for the squads. Men with dynamite and fuses and caps have gone to blow up the other bridges, after the work starts. No hurry. It may be a long wait. Have patience."

Vikoski slid away. The dancing auroa borealis was slowly growing stronger.



but not before it was out across the two mined piers.

His figure could be seen approaching the copse. Presently the lone man came in, with word that the Captain had chosen to stay there alone.

Kurt Akonen hoped that Vikoski would not close the switch by mistake.

AKONEN composed himself to patience. With him, at this point, was the squad which would attack the hut opposite; others, on the right, were posted opposite the airplane and barracks there. Every man had his picked duty. Some had capped and fused dynamite sticks to throw as bombs at close quarters. Others were assigned to use rifles only.

A mutter, a running word of alarm, of caution. The air was athrob. By some quirk of the dancing northern lights, two planes coming up from the south caught a full reflection of the greenish glare. They were low-flying.

"Train coming," said someone.

The largest hut, that near the grounded airplane off to the right, disgorged a group of men. They were singing, their voices lifting in riotous, raucous sound. And through this, through the growing roar of the two planes, Kurt Akonen caught a sudden agonized yelp from one of the Finns close at hand. Others, turning, took it up. He, too, turned.

From the trees behind them and at one side, a ray of light was reaching up

at the sky—*stab, stab-stab, stab*, flashing off and on. In the frightful, sickening instant of comprehension, Akonen's mind drove to Pete Babenks. Either he, or someone else, was signaling those flyers.

The two planes thundered on overhead. A light broke out from one of them, reaching at the snow. They changed course, separated, zoomed, and turned.

"They saw it," said a mournful voice, as hope died.

Other tongues leaped—the train! Its headlight appeared. But the two planes were sweeping back, now, skimming the trees. One opened fire with a machine-gun, then the other. No need of any signal now! Kurt heard the bullets whistle and whine all around. Two of the men beside him were kicking in the snow. The others were gone to their objective.

And the train was coming on, an immensely long train, partly armored.

Flares broke out. The two planes circled and came back. The soldiers near the grounded plane were in wild activity, hauling out machine-guns, and getting a searchlight to work. The flares revealed everything, even the onrushing Finns in their white parkas.

A groan burst from Kurt Akonen as he looked. The two planes had separated widely. One was skirting the railroad,

machine-guns going. The scattered Finns were mowed down as they ran. Not all, however. Those with the machine-gun had it almost to the railroad bed, and it opened suddenly on the crowded soldiers fifty yards away. The searchlight died out. The soldiers scattered frantically as the lead tore through them. An instant later, a trickle of flame rose from the grounded plane; the two men assigned to that job, had managed it. And the train was sweeping on, brakes shrieking, too heavy to be stopped at once. A searchlight was breaking out from it, then another, fingering across the snow.

AKONEN'S pistol was in his hand; one of the planes was rushing straight at him, apparently. He looked up, startled, lifted the pistol, fired rapidly: the plane was not twenty feet above. Something hit him violently, and he pitched sideways into the snow.

He could not have lain there long. He floundered, got loose from his skis, came to one knee with a splitting pain across the back of his head. Fingering it, he found blood, already frozen; a bullet wound, whether serious or not, he could not tell. He found his pistol, found his fur cap, got his skis buckled on again and stood up. Binoculars were slung about his neck. He got them out and focused them clumsily.

Through them, he could see Captain Vikoski, who lay outstretched at the edge of the little copse; bullets must have found him also. There was no difficulty in seeing. From the grounded plane a column of fire was sweeping up. Rifles were going, a machine-gun was stuttering. Northward, a red spurt roared; the men with dynamite and fuses had reached their objective yonder. There, too, in the snow, another flaming pillar burned among the trees, and there was only one plane in the air. Kurt wondered dully whether his pistol-shots had brought down that plane, now burning its heart out!

Then his wonder passed, in the realization that someone must reach the copse where Vikoski lay dead, and blow up that bridge span.

He tried to move, and found himself able. The train was coming, was already passing the hut and the burning grounded plane; the Finnish machine-gun was blasting at it. From the train, searchlights fastened on the gun; several machine-guns at once began to work, and the Finns died. The train swept on, slowly coming to a halt, but not before it was

out across the two mined piers. There it rested.

The one plane in the air was sweeping back, close to the snow. Kurt squatted, white parka hood pulled over cap. Bullets buzzed around him, the plane went on. He stood up, and was aware of a man on skis close to him, coming at him.

"Hi, Kurt! Thought it was you. Glad I ran into you."

Kurt's pistol came up. Pete Babenks! "Here, hold on!" cried the other hastily. "I can fix everything for you, Kurt; you and me are old friends, see? They'll do what I say—"

"It was your flashlight," broke in Akonen. "It was you who warned them!"

"Yep; had to knock out the feller watching me," said the other. "No use lying about it, I guess. I'll take care of you, Kurt. You've got nothing to fear—hey! You aint going to murder me?" The man's voice shrilled. "I aint got a gun, Kurt! Don't murder me!"

Akonen laughed harshly. "Not murder: execution, you damned traitor!"

"Oh! Traitor yourself!" Babenks drew himself up, suddenly changing tone. "All right, then kill me, damn you! Sure I was a spy, aiming to get over into Finland. Sure I took the chance of giving you away. I'd do it again. That's my business, like yours is fighting on the other side. Don't call me a traitor, though. Go ahead, damn you!"

KURT froze, his unmitten hand growing icy as he waited. It smote into him what this man was, after all. An enemy, yes. An enemy who had done his desperate best, probably knowing himself doomed in doing it; starting on one errand and switching perforce to another where he could do the most good.

"Do you want to be shot, Pete?" demanded Akonen.

"Of course not, you damned fool!"

"All right. I'm responsible for your being alive now, for what you've done. Go along with me as a prisoner to stand trial, and I'll not shoot you—unless you try to escape. Don't think for a moment that I'll trust you. Yes or no?"

"Yes!" cried the other, after one deep breath of incredulity.

"All right. Turn around. See that copse of trees?" Akonen pointed. "We go there first, then beat it for the frontier. I want to make sure if Captain Vikoski's dead. You go first."

"You're a worse fool than I thought you—" began Babenks.

Akonen cut him short.

"Never mind that. Travel! And if you make a break, I'll kill you."

THOUGH Akonen had no particular idea of mercy, it had flashed upon him that Babenks would be a prisoner of value, who knew a lot and could be made to talk. Also, there was his own responsibility, not to be shirked. First of all, detonate those charges, help Vikoski if that were possible, and get away. The madness of this intent was plain before him—searchlights from the train were sweeping the whole expanse; men were pouring from the coaches; the airplane was curving around and returning.

"March!" said Kurt. "I'm after you."

Babenks obeyed, with a rolling curse. That little copse was horribly close to the railroad. The airplane came and roared past, either not seeing them or ignoring them. Then a searchlight from the train picked up the two figures and held steady. Kurt realized it was the end. A machine-gun would be chattering at them in another moment. He must plunge forward and throw that switch before they got him—reach that copse if he had to do it on hands and knees!

"All right, Pete," his voice crackled. "Wait here. I'm going—"

He heard a machine-gun begin its infernal stuttering—another joined in; he was lost, and knew it. Then something happened. Beneath the train leaped forth a huge crimson glare. Another explosion flamed from the farther pier. One or both of those detonations must have reached munitions in the cars; with an air-shattering roar and a sheet of fire that soared into the sky, the entire train seemed to disintegrate; so did the earth and snow and heaven. In the very flash of realization that the switch had been closed, Akonen was knocked a dozen feet away and under the snow.

That shock was terrific. He struggled out, extricating his skis; train and soldiers and track seemed blown out of existence. Things began to rain all around—bits of flesh of men, wood, steel fragments. Akonen, trying to fasten his ski-clasps, stumbled over a body. He stooped. It was Pete Babenks, dead, pierced by half a dozen machine-gun bullets in the instant before the explosion.

Kurt realized now that blood was on his neck, coming from his ears; he was deaf. No matter. He slid forward. No one paid any heed to him now; the very air was still aquiver with frightful echoes

and more frightful voices. He came to the copse. There was Captain Vikoski, just as Kurt had seen him through the binoculars, lying with hands outflung, a smile on his wedge-like features. He was dead, had been dead a long time, frozen hard.

So he had not closed the switch. Who had, then? It lay a dozen feet away from Vikoski. There was no one else here. The snow showed no traces of anyone else. Kurt Akonen stood up, a cry on his lips, looking wildly around. He thought he could hear Vikoski's voice in his ear: "*All the ghosts and the ancient spells of Finland are helping us. . . . Everybody knows a Finn is a wizard.*"

Kurt Akonen turned and slid away, away toward the forest and the white birches and the frontier. There were a dozen reasons why that explosion might have been delayed, and none of them was probable. Nothing was probable. Vikoski was laughing again, laughing in his shrill, mocking way. Kurt Akonen, hearing that laughing voice, glanced around.

Then he realized there was no voice at all. He could hear nothing; he was stone deaf, and his ears burned, and his wounded head hurt horribly. "*We shall perish,*" Captain Vikoski had said. "*We must give ourselves for Finland. . . . But you, who come to our aid from a far country, you will be helped.*"

HE came upon something dark against the snow; it was the body of Pete Babenks. He halted, looking down. The spy had got his deserts, after all. Akonen stooped, with some difficulty, and got his hand inside the frozen bloody fur coat. There was the roll of money; he took it, gladly. Russian money, blood-money; Finland could use it! And he took, also, the man's passport. He would need that, to send the five-spot he owed; he must send it to Pete's widow in Detroit, he reflected.

Then he rose and *sluff-sluffed* on, in among the trees, where one or two figures in white parkas moved to meet him. Only one or two. There was no pursuit. Behind, everything was death and ruin.

Kurt Akonen faced toward the frontier again, and his face was twisted in a wondering, hopeless frown of inquiry. That switch had been a good dozen feet away from the frozen corpse of Vikoski. Who, then, had closed it? Who—Or what?

He could guess, all right; but it was only a guess—a Finn's guess.

Orient Express



*A comedy of the Intelligence service—
and a surprising exploit of the Red Wolf
of Arabia.*

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

By WILLIAM MAKIN

E*N voiture, mesdames et mes-*
sieurs!"

The chocolate-uniformed conductor of the Athens coach of the Orient Express almost whispered the command. But Europe was again at war, and the heavily masked lights of the Gare de Lyon induced subdued tones. Every window of the train was firmly closed and curtained. The few travelers, soon to be hermetically sealed for the crossing of many frontiers, broke away from mute groups and scabbled aboard.

Five minutes to nine.

Paul Rodgers lit another cigarette and cursed softly. Beyond the barrier he saw groups of French soldiers, bowed under the burdens of rifles, knapsacks, shrapnel helmets and nailed boots, drifting toward a troop-train: Paris was sending another batch of men to defend the Maginot Line. Rodgers wished devoutly that he was going with them. Instead, he waited impatiently for a woman, and a journey that would take him away from war.

At two minutes to nine she arrived.

She came imperiously, attended by three uniformed porters of the most luxurious hotel in Paris. The brilliant-colored scarf that floated from her throat, the fountain of sables cascading from her shoulders, and the high French heels of her shoes seemed an affront to this shabby, serious Paris of the winter of 1940. With her head held high and her unusually beautiful features emerging toward him from out of the gloom, Rodgers saw her as a living replica of the Winged Victory of Samothrace.

For one moment her brilliant dark eyes rested upon him as he stood there in his rather shabby traveling-clothes. Rodgers felt himself redden. The glance was more than the cold blank stare of a statue. It registered deliberate indifference.

She gestured with an exquisitely gloved hand to the train, and flung a few contemptuous words of French at the porters. They hurled themselves forward with her little mountain of baggage. A moment later they bowed to her contemptuous dismissal.

She stepped aboard. A lamp was waved, dumbly. Without a sound, in almost furtive fashion, the Orient Express began to glide away from the platform. Rodgers had swung himself aboard. He had to stand in the corridor while the magnificent creature gave strategic orders to the conductor for the disposal of her baggage in the compartment. It seemed likely to be interminable.

"Will you pardon me?" said Rodgers, in English.

She turned her dark eyes upon him again. There was the faint suggestion in her imperious gaze that someone had spoken. She stepped delicately into her compartment.

"Thank you!" muttered Rodgers.

His own compartment was adjoining. He flung himself on his bunk. He was perspiring as though after a fierce encounter. When the conductor stepped in to collect tickets and passport, Rodgers was refreshing himself with a flask of cognac.

"When do we reach Athens?" he asked.

"Three days hence, monsieur."



Then, with the sudden, whirling motion of throwing a hand-grenade, he hurled it.

Rodgers sighed at the departing conductor, and gave himself up to sleep.

He awoke abruptly. He reached over and flicked up the blind. Dawn was tinting the snow-capped mountains. He judged the train had just left Lausanne. The wheels were sounding rhythmically. But it was a quiet, precise conversation in French in the adjoining compartment that had awakened him. The imperious voice of the woman sounded.

"I swear that if you do not leave this compartment at once, I will shoot you!"

A heavy masculine laugh had followed.

"That would be a great pity, Fräulein, both for you and that charming young man whose photograph I see in your dressing-case."

"My brother can look after himself."

"Maybe, but—"

"What do you want?"

"To talk business—big business."

Bent with his ear to the thin door separating the two compartments, Rodgers did not hesitate. He reached out for a dressing-gown, inserted a key in the lock, and stepped into the lighted compartment.

Two faces swiveled at his entrance. The woman, in a yellow silk dressing-gown that emphasized the raven-black hair drooping over her proud neck, opened her eyes wide in astonishment. Her slim

hand held an automatic pistol. It was pointed at a heavy, grizzled-haired man who was in the act of lighting a cigarette. But even his blue eyes registered surprise as the lithe figure of the newcomer stepped into the compartment.

"*Der Teufel!*" he exclaimed. "It is my old enemy Paul Rodgers, the Red Wolf of Arabia."

WITH a tightening of his lips, Rodgers recognized the German.

"I might have known, Krauss, that you would be up to your old tricks."

"But my dear Rodgers, my country is at war."

"I am quite aware of it."

"And once again we are enemies?"

"Very much so."

"A pity. But it is amusing to meet like this on neutral soil."

"May I point out," interposed that imperious voice, "that you are making use of my personal *wagon-lit* for your reunion."

Krauss grinned at Rodgers.

"She is a beauty, *hein?* It is a pleasure to have to deal with such a creature."

"Nevertheless, she is a lady," replied Rodgers, "and I must say that under the circumstances you are behaving in a disgusting fashion."

The German shrugged.

"Always your fault, my dear Rodgers, insisting upon being a gentleman under all circumstances. The British will never win a war with public-school inhibitions."

"May I again ask both of you gentlemen to what I owe the honor of your forced entrance into my compartment?" Her voice was acid. "If no explanation and apologies are promptly forthcoming, I propose to stop the train."

HER hand was already reaching for the alarm-signal.

"Please, Fräulein, no further delaying of the Orient Express," said Krauss. "It was an hour late when I boarded it at Lausanne, and a dismal business it was, waiting in the dawn. Suppose you put away that absurd pistol and ring for the conductor, instead. I think it would be an excellent idea for us all to have hot coffee and rolls in this compartment."

"I don't think I ought to allow that," said Rodgers, stubbornly.

"Oh, come! I give you my word that I will not talk business."

"Well, if the lady has no objections?" hesitated Rodgers, turning toward her.

There was suppressed fury in her eyes. Nevertheless she thrust the pistol into a pocket of the yellow dressing-gown and rang for the conductor. That individual appeared in shirt-sleeves and yawning. His yawn froze at the sight of the trio.

"Coffee and rolls for three, *vite!*" demanded Krauss.

If the circumstances were peculiar, the coffee and rolls when served were excellent. Krauss, helping himself liberally to butter, was in an amiable mood.

"How delightful to find oneself at this time in a country which is not at war, and with no food rationing!" he murmured, gulping his coffee greedily. "I must say the Swiss always do themselves well."

"The Swiss have happily preserved their neutrality for over a hundred years," emphasized Rodgers.

"Alas, that is true," nodded the German. "They might have produced more men of genius had they been invaded. As it is, after a century of peace, their greatest creation is the cuckoo clock. What do you think of the Swiss, Fräulein?"

The lady in the yellow dressing-gown licked some apricot jam delicately from her finger-tips before replying. She was beginning to accept the unusual couple with more equanimity. Nevertheless she retained a cat-like aloofness.

"I have met the Swiss only in hotels," she replied vaguely. "I find them very attentive and efficient. Their faces remind me of the cows in their pastures."

Krauss flung back his head and roared. "You have wit as well as beauty, Fräulein Coukidis. If the Greeks had an Aristophanes today, he would be writing a comedy worthy of you."

There was a slight flush on her unrouged cheeks.

"Both of you appear to know who I am," she began.

"Who has not heard of Dmitri Coukidis, the Greek millionaire of Piræus whose fleet of freight-steamers covers the Levant!" murmured Krauss. "But I will confess that this is the first time I have met his charming and beautiful daughter, Fräulein Hélène."

"Yet you choose to introduce yourself by knocking at the door of my compartment, announcing yourself as a customs' official and demanding entrance," she continued. "Who are you, Herr Krauss, if that is really your name?"

"I can answer that," said Rodgers, draining his cup of coffee. "I have his *dossier* complete in my mind. We are old—er—enemies."

"So I gathered," she said.

"Go ahead, my dear Rodgers," said Krauss. "Tell her the worst. I am all attention. Is there any butter left?"

RODGERS hesitated. "Yes, Karl Krauss really is his name," he began. "He seldom changes it, even though he is one of the best secret agents of the Nachrichten Bureau of Berlin."

"I change it no more than you do your own, Rodgers," interposed the German. He smiled reassuringly at the Greek lady. "Do not believe those fantastic stories of the secret service that you read in books, Fräulein. Rodgers, who is one of the best agents in the British Intelligence, will tell you that such tales are nonsense."

"I do not waste my time reading such books," said Hélène Coukidis, coldly.

"I first met Krauss some years ago in Teheran," resumed Rodgers. "He claimed to be nothing more exciting than a traveler in toys—German toys, of course. He sold flaxen-haired dolls to dark-haired people, and incidentally made puppets of them all. His real business was the selling of machine-guns, airplanes and incendiary bombs. His political objective was a revolution, and then the appropriation

for Germany of the British-capitalized oil-fields."

"Pleasant days!" mused Krauss.

"He managed to get the Shah of Persia out of the way by inducing him to go to Paris. Paris, he shrewdly decided, would kill the Shah with its pleasures quicker than would Berlin. His plans were working out admirably. The Shah died in Paris. The subtle business of revolution began. Krauss became a nuisance. It was necessary to get rid of him."

"Why didn't you kill him?" asked the Greek lady.

Krauss, his mouth full of food, protested.

"My dear Fräulein, I'm sure you do read those fantastic spy novels."

"Within a week of my arrival in Teheran, I had him shanghaied one night," went on Rodgers, complacently. "Krauss was taken to Basra, pushed aboard a steamer, and I conveniently forgot him. I did not see him again for some years."

"A DIRTY trick," said Krauss, shaking his head. "I wouldn't have believed my friend Rodgers capable of it. Do you know, Fräulein, that I did not step ashore from that filthy ship until three weeks later. I then discovered that I was in Sourabaya, and a very long way from home."

"But he got home in time," resumed Rodgers. "He resumed his profitable occupation, selling guns from the factory of Krupp. He was sent to South America, and wherever he found trade bad, he started a revolution. I heard that he did quite well."

"Very well, *danke sehr*."

"Krauss returned to a Germany that was itself in revolution. One heard of him in a gang led by Ludendorff. Then he was engaged by the famous Colonel Nicolai. By the time Hitler and the Nazis were in power, Krauss, because of his experience, held an important post. Later I met him in Istanbul. On that occasion Krauss behaved in almost disgraceful manner."

"Actually, I returned the dirty trick with interest on my old friend Rodgers," chuckled Krauss, lighting a cigarette.



The swift blow caught him beneath the jaw.

"Now, with our countries at war, we meet again," said Rodgers, quietly.

"And in my private compartment," insisted the Greek lady, helping herself to a cigarette from the packet carelessly thrown toward her by Krauss.

"That is only because Krauss works with a brutal directness," said Rodgers, also helping himself to a cigarette.

"May I ask, then, why I should be the victim of your forced entrance, the subject of your threats, and suffer the doubtful pleasure of your company?" asked the Greek lady.

"I assure you, Fräulein, I have the most amiable intentions."

"I am waiting to hear Mr. Rodgers' explanation," she said severely. "He appears to be possessed of a key opening to my compartment, which is more than you could claim, Herr Krauss."

"I admit an explanation is due, mademoiselle," smiled Rodgers. "Might I suggest, therefore, that you join me at a table for luncheon, in the restaurant-car at noon?"

"Excellent idea," exclaimed Krauss. "Make it a table for three."

"I have no intention of allowing you to force your acquaintance further upon this lady."

"Oh, come, Rodgers!"

"I think I should prefer a table à deux," said the Greek lady coldly. "Perhaps Herr Krauss may have the opportunity of forcing himself upon my company at dinner, which I understand is at eight o'clock."

"Shortly after leaving Trieste," nodded the German. The smile had left his face. "Yes, I think we shall be dining together, Fräulein." He saw that an equally stern expression was on the face of Rodgers. He rose slowly to his feet, gave a stiff bow and a click of the heels. "*Auf wiedersehen*, then."

PICKING up his packet of cigarettes, he sauntered out of the compartment.

The Greek lady turned to Rodgers.

"And now, perhaps you'll oblige me also by leaving my compartment. We meet again at noon."

With a sigh, Rodgers rose and passed through the communicating doors. As he entered his own compartment, he heard the savage snap of a bolt.

From the windows of the restaurant-car, the placid waters of Lake Maggiore reflecting mountains and islands, seemed a vision of an unreal world, a world at peace. But Rodgers had to admit that

the vision confronting him was much more distracting. Hélène Coukidis had taken the trouble to appear at her best. Incidentally her velvet eyes rested approvingly on the slim, agile figure of Rodgers with his earnest, ascetic features.

"It begins to appear that you are adopting the role of protector to me," she began, sipping at the excellent wine which he had chosen.

"I am afraid that is exactly why I am here," he admitted.

"But why? Is it considered dangerous for a woman to take a journey in the Orient Express, even though Europe is at war?"

There was an ironic smile on her slightly rouged lips.

"Extremely dangerous," said Rodgers, quietly, "particularly when you are carrying a document signed by the British Government, and worth nearly half a million pounds."

Her hand instinctively went to her silk-embroidered blouse.

"So you know why I went to London?"

RODGERS glanced over his shoulder. Several tables away, Karl Krauss was enjoying a hearty luncheon with a huge mug of beer. The German raised the mug of beer in genial salute, grinned, and bent his grizzled head to the meal.

"I am fully aware, mademoiselle, that on the outbreak of war, your father, Dmitri Coukidis, shrewdly decided he would offer his fleet of steamers to the highest bidder in Britain or Germany. Unable to travel, himself, he sent you, his daughter, to negotiate the sale in London. At the same time your brother Simon was sent to Berlin to discuss the same proposition with the Nazi Government. Dmitri Coukidis knew full well the value to the Nazis of his steamers trading under the Greek flag. Plying across the Mediterranean and using such ports as Piræus, Trieste and even Genoa, they could carry the desperately needed supplies for a Germany at war."

"I can see that you fully appreciate the value of my father's business," she smiled.

"Let us say that the British Government fully appreciated the value of those ships to the extent of half a million pounds," said Rodgers. "They, at least, were determined that Germany should not have the use of this fleet of freighters. Within twenty-four hours of your arrival in London, an offer was made. A bill of sale was approved, and an order

on the Ægean Bank in Athens handed to you. It needs only the acceptance of your father, to whom you are now taking the document, for the sale to be concluded."

"Well, then," she flashed at him, "if such a satisfactory deal has been concluded, why should the British Government consider it necessary to provide me with such a—er—presentable escort?"

Rodgers flushed at this speech.

"Because the deal is not really concluded until your father, Dmitri Coukidis, presents the order on the bank," he said.

"Are you suggesting that what the Coukidis promise they do not fulfill?"

He shrugged. "The forced entry of Karl Krauss into your compartment this morning indicates that Germany has not yet given up hope of securing that fleet of steamers for use by the Nazis. We were fully aware in London that your brother was trying to deal with Wilhelmstrasse at the same time that you were negotiating an offer in Whitehall. The British Government closed the deal exactly an hour before the Nazi Government offered to buy. I believe the British figure was slightly higher than that offered by the Nazis?"

"APPARENTLY even my private telegrams have been read," she said, biting her lips.

"Despite their attempt at a code, yes," he replied. "Once the deal was completed in London, you booked on the Orient Express. I was ordered to travel on the same train and see that you arrived safely—with the bill-of-sale—at Athens."

"Which explains your own uninvited entry into my *wagon-lit*?"

"Exactly. Krauss has obviously been ordered to rectify this business which was bungled by Wilhelmstrasse. His aim is to secure the steamers for Germany. It explains his boarding the train at Lausanne."

"And you really think that an individual of the caliber of this Herr Krauss can divert the sale to Nazi Germany?"

"I have never underestimated the powers of Karl Krauss, even though I deplore his methods," smiled Rodgers in his turn. "He is without doubt empowered to offer you a higher price than that given by Britain."

"It is too late," she said. "You will both discover that the word of a Coukidis is as good as a bond. The deal is settled."

"Which means that Krauss will attempt more direct methods," said Rodgers, bluntly. "It is likely to be something more drastic than entering your *wagon-lit*."

"For example?"

"Did I not hear him threaten you regarding your brother, the youth whose photograph you carried in your dressing-case?"

He saw her cheeks pale.

"He can do nothing against my brother. Simon is already on his way to Trieste, there to board this train and accompany me back to our father in Athens. I had a telegram from him, after he had left Berlin. He congratulated me on the deal in London."

"Even so," said Rodgers, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "there are unusual resources at the command of our fellow-traveler, Karl Krauss."

"Let us not spoil this lunch further with talk of business," she said. "It appears that I am to have your company as far as Athens. I intend to make the most of it. It was a charming thought of the British Government to provide me with a bodyguard. Now that you have introduced yourself, I wish to say I approve. In fact, I know I shall enjoy the feeling of security you bring."

There was a flirtatious gleam in her eyes, but Rodgers did not respond.

She sensed his indifference, and it piqued her feminine assurance. She savagely stubbed the cigarette in the ash-tray. The train had stopped for a few moments. She glanced out of the windows at the peasants on the platform.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Baveno," he replied. "We are now in Italy. On the other side of the lake, there, you can see Stresa."

"Famous for another international failure," she nodded. "I wonder where the Peace Treaty of this war will be signed, and whether it will be worth the paper it is written on?"

But Rodgers did not reply. He had just glimpsed the burly form of Karl Krauss emerging from the telegraph office. The German gave a genial grin to an Italian officer pacing the platform.

The next moment the Orient Express moved toward Milan.

"TRIESTE in ten minutes, monsieur." Rodgers roused himself from his book of verse, the rhythmic rumble of wheels, and the brightly lit compartment. He flicked up the blind and stared out



Seated at a small desk was Hélène Coukidis.

into the darkness. The blackness was split by a beam of light from the harbor lighthouse. A liner, her decks brightly lit, and arc-lamps revealing derricks swinging cargo aboard, showed that this Mediterranean port was exceedingly busy.

The mellowed Austrian architecture flitted past. The brick walls were scrawled with Italian inscriptions, the "*Viva Mussolini*" forcing itself upon the attention. Then the illumination increased. The Orient Express had steamed into the station. The platform was lively with uniformed figures, vendors of newspapers, and the inevitable white-jacketed youth pushing a cart filled with bottles of Chianti, cold roasted chickens, ham rolls, and coffee. The station clock registered eight o'clock. The Orient Express was on time.

As the train drew to a standstill, Rodgers let down the window and leaned out. The chocolate-uniformed attendant was already chanting instructions in the corridor of the train.

"*Messieurs et mesdames!* Please to remain seated in your compartments. No one is permitted to leave the train."

Yet one figure had descended, even before the Orient Express drew to a standstill. It was the lively, irrepressible Karl Krauss. He hurried forward, to be met by two Italian policemen, who saluted him importantly. They conversed quickly together. One of the policemen jerked a hand significantly over his shoulder. Rodgers followed the direction of the gesture.

As he did so, he heard a cry from the next compartment. Hélène Coukidis was leaning forth from her window, an eager expectancy on her face. Rodgers realized she was searching for a glimpse of her brother, who had promised to meet her on the train at Trieste. She had suddenly seen him.

Pale-faced, and with a strained expression, he was walking down the platform. On either side of him marched an Italian policeman. His hands were held in mute fashion before him. They were man-



She was about to sign the document.

acted, and he was being urged toward the waiting Karl Krauss and the other two policemen.

The German watched the approach with a sardonic grin on his face. He lifted his face toward the agitated Hélène Coukidis.

"A depressing business, Fräulein," he murmured. "It seems your brother has been arrested on a serious charge. Espionage, I am told. I have decided to remain in Trieste myself and see that justice is done. Should you also desire to descend here, I have already arranged the trifling matter of your passport visa. It is possible for you to stay the night. I am told they serve a most excellent dinner in the Hotel Bella Vista—where, no doubt, you would like to join me."

But already she was struggling toward the platform, and she ran toward her captive brother.

"Simon! What have they done? Where are they taking you?"

She gasped the words in Greek.

The good-looking youth shrugged.

"Don't worry, Hélène. They've arrested me on a fantastic charge. They got nothing against me, and—"

Roughly, at a sign from Krauss, the policemen jerked the youth away. Impetuously, Hélène was about to follow, but the bulky form of Krauss barred the way.

"You heard what your brother sa Fräulein? There is no need to worry. I am looking into his case personally. Ah, I see already the conductor is depositing your baggage on the platform. Shall we say dinner within the hour, Fräulein? *Auf wiedersehen!*"

And with a parting grin, he swaggered away in the direction taken by the Italian police and their prisoner.

Rodgers had quickly sensed the implication of this new development. In spite of the protest of the conductor, he forced his way on to the brightly lit platform. He tried to speak to Hélène Coukidis, but she was almost hysterical.

"Simon is in danger. I must go to him," she repeated excitedly.

"But don't you realize that it is a trick, a prearranged plan to prevent you from reaching Athens?"

"I must be with Simon."

"And what about the contract with the British Government, signed in the name of Coukidis?"

"What care I for any contract?" she flashed back. "Simon is in danger."

Rodgers groaned in his impatience. He wanted to seize this woman and forcibly thrust her back on to the Orient Express. But already she was moving toward the station exit, her baggage trundled along behind. Rodgers realized that importuning officials were all the time at his side, babbling in Italian, French and bad English for him to resume his place on the train.

"It is absolutely forbidden—*defendu*—*verboden*—for a passenger to walk the platform. I beg of you, monsieur, *mistaire*—signor—before you are arrested—"

ARRESTED! The word fixed itself in the mind of Rodgers. He turned. The white-jacketed youth came alongside pushing the cart filled with bottles of Chianti, cold roasted chickens, and ham rolls. At a gesture from Rodgers he stopped expectantly.

The lithe figure with the red hair leaned toward the cart, a strange gleam in his eyes. He selected the largest bottle of Chianti he could find. Deliberately he held it poised in his hand for a second. Then, with the sudden, whirling motion of throwing a hand-grenade, he hurled it through the window of the station restaurant. The awful crash of glass transfixed those persons on the platform.

But Rodgers had only just begun. Another, and yet another bottle he seized and flung in other directions. A roasted chicken caught a bustling Italian business man in his well-lined spaghetti paunch. He slid to the ground with a groan. A ham roll plastered the face of a policeman. The grinning driver of the Orient Express, leaning over the side of the locomotive, caught with grimy hand a flying packet of chocolate.

"*Bravissimo!*" he chortled, and then spat fury as an orange struck his face.

The white-jacketed youth stood with mouth open, watching this madman wrecking his stock-in-trade. Every bottle of wine had been smashed. The cart was almost empty. Then, when the madman saw an approaching posse of police, the trolley was sent careering madly along the platform toward them. They

dodged it agilely, and it crashed into a bookstall, where yellow-backs tumbled in an avalanche of disorder.

It was all over in three minutes. The Italian agents fell upon Rodgers. The blowing of police whistles mingled with the impatient whistle of the Orient Express. Ignoring the struggle, a railway official walked the length of the train blowing a tin trumpet. There was a hiss of steam as Rodgers went to the floor of the platform beneath the weight of law and order. . . .

As the Orient Express jerked itself out of the station, Paul Rodgers was being jerked out of the exit. Hatless, and with his clothes drenched in red wine, he was bustled into a taxi.

Already the rumor was being gasped about Trieste. . . .

"A violent assassin has been captured at the railway station. The monster killed six people, and when he was overpowered, was streaming with blood!"

The cell into which they flung Paul Rodgers, unceremoniously, after a painstaking examination of the charge of violent insanity, was merely a box of cement.

Slightly disheveled, but exhilarated from his struggle, Rodgers realized at first glance that escape was impossible. The Italian who had built that prison, was evidently acquainted with the classic story of Casanova's escape over the leads in Venice. He intended that no distinguished political prisoner should follow that example. Even the barred window was situated some nine feet from the ground.

BUT the fact that it was a prison used for opponents of the Fascist regime, was one of the reasons why Rodgers was exhilarated. He had discovered that, ten minutes previous to his own struggling entry in the hands of the Italian police, a young Greek, Simon Coukidis, suspected of espionage, had been lodged in the cell next to the one in which he was so hastily flung to await proceedings.

Rodgers had, of course, been searched. The importantly uniformed chief of the prison who received him was obviously disappointed at finding only a book of verse, some small change and a piece of chicken in the pockets of his prisoner. There ought to have been more in the possession of one traveling de luxe from Paris to Athens in the Orient Express. But that in itself made the charge of

madness more than plausible, confirmed by the quiet inquiry of the prisoner as to whether he could be locked in a cell that contained a piano.

Actually, Rodgers was possessed of other material belongings. A thin wad of French banknotes, for example, to the value of a thousand francs each. These he now conjured from somewhere beneath his torn clothing. He gazed at one of these thousand-franc notes thoughtfully, for a moment, and then pushed it beneath the door of his cell. It materialized in the corridor, along which paced a prison warder, heavily.

It was true the warder was dreaming of a certain dark-haired girl with the face and allurements of a Botticelli angel, but his ideas changed quickly at the sight of the thousand-franc note. His footsteps faltered. He glanced swiftly over his shoulder. No one was looking. He was alone with his duty. Swiftly he stooped and picked up the note, and equally as swiftly it disappeared within his uniform. Then he resumed his pacing of the corridor, and only with an effort could recall that vision of the dark-haired beauty.

THE next time he passed the cell where the madman was lodged, he was all alert. He felt somewhat aggrieved that another thousand-franc note was not visible. In fact, he was roused sufficiently to thrust back the grille shutter over the door of the cell and peer into the lighted interior. What he saw, intrigued him. The madman stood in the center of the cell, holding in his hand in enticing fashion two further notes of a thousand francs each. Impossible to resist such insolence from a prisoner: once again the guard looked over his shoulder, satisfied himself that all was well, and opened the door of the cell.

He may have been surprised at the swift blow that caught him beneath the jaw and caused him to slide to the floor. But his mind was equally swift. Before he fell, his clawing hand caught the two thousand-franc notes. And as he rolled helplessly to the ground, the notes also disappeared within his tunic. All that was lost was the bunch of keys which Rodgers calmly appropriated. The prisoner stepped out of the cell into the corridor, and locked the door behind him. He moved swiftly to the next cell, unlocked it, and entered. A youth was sitting in hunched, despairing fashion on the bed. He was Simon Coukidis.

"Come along!" announced Rodgers, in French. "*Venez vite!* I have a call to make before we set off for Athens."

The youth looked up in surprise.

"Who are you? And where are you taking me?"

"I'm taking you to see your sister," said Rodgers calmly. "Any further introductions can wait."

Such was his peremptory tone, that the young man did not hesitate. He followed Rodgers' cat-like tread along the corridor. He was in an agony of suspense while various keys were tried on different doors leading to an exercise yard beyond, and heaved a sigh of relief when the main gateway presented no difficulties, owing to a merry Chianti party taking place in the distant lodge. The street beyond was dimly lit, and their hurried progress was unnoticed.

Rodgers calmly made his way to the main street where many citizens of Trieste promenaded in thankfulness for the few lighted cafés and cinemas which were crowded. A garage announced itself in blood-red neon. Rodgers entered, and was soon bargaining with the shirt-sleeved proprietor.

"A car to take you into Jugoslavia?" said the proprietor. "That is two hundred kilometers. And with this cursed shortage in gasoline—" He shrugged.

"How much?" demanded Rodgers.

"For a thousand lire, it might be possible."

"I'll give you one thousand five hundred if you can have a car ready in five minutes."

"*Presto!*" shouted the proprietor, realizing that this was business. At his command a sad-faced mechanic emerged from the shadows. Still gulping the remains of his supper, he began to struggle with a powerful Fiat.

"This is madness," ventured Simon Coukidis. "Already it is possible our escape has been discovered. They will send police cars in pursuit."

"Exactly what I was thinking," smiled Rodgers.

"Well, then?"

"Jump in! The car is ready." Rodgers turned to the driver. "Drive first to the Hotel Bella Vista. I have to collect some baggage."

IN a moment they were speeding along the main street. They drew up outside a towering mass of cement which announced itself as the Hotel Bella Vista, with "all modern comforts." Telling the



Her brother, in excited Greek, intervened. "Let's get away, Hé-lène, while we can."

driver to wait, Rodgers strode confidently into the lobby of the hotel followed by the hesitant young Greek. He faced the reception-clerk.

"Herr Karl Krauss is expecting me," he said, in German. "What room?"

The harsh Prussian accents jerked the clerk to attention.

"Suite Sixty-seven, *mein Herr*. Shall I announce you?"

"No."

Rodgers was already striding into the elevator, followed by the Greek. Arriving at the sixth floor they walked along the corridor until Suite Sixty-seven revealed itself.

Rodgers rapped at the door.

"An urgent message for Herr Krauss," he announced.

Something like a sigh came from the room beyond. The door was unlocked, and the irritated face of Krauss appeared. But the irritation turned to baffled rage as he was thrust forcibly aside, and Rodgers and the youth elbowed their way into the suite. Once again Rodgers

took the precaution to lock the door behind him, taking the key and pocketing it. Then he turned.

In the background, seated at a small desk, was Hélène Coukidis. A pen was in her hand, and she was obviously about to sign the document which Krauss had placed before her. In the black evening gown she wore, the pallor of her features was emphasized. There was open astonishment in her dark eyes at this sudden entry. But she rose swiftly with a cry to embrace her brother.

Krauss had realized the situation as soon as the two men entered. As Rodgers reached out for the document on the desk, his harsh voice was heard.

"Put up your hands, all of you! I'll shoot the first one who dares to move."

He had his back to the door, and had leveled a pistol at the trio.

Rodgers turned, raising his hands, slowly.

"My dear Krauss," he said, quietly, "you are behaving as usual like a character in one of those novels you read.

Don't be a fool. Realize that you're beaten."

Krauss recovered his geniality at once, but kept the pistol pointed steadily at the group, where brother and sister had fallen apart, each of them raising hands, Hélène Coukidis contemptuously.

"As usual, Rodgers, you are rushing your fences. That, I believe, is the correct English expression? But now that you have so gayly stumbled into this room, I shall make full use of you. You will kindly witness the signature to the document that Fräulein Coukidis is about to sign, which sells the fleet of steamers possessed by her father to the German Reich. The Wilhelmstrasse is rather meticulous about the legality of such signatures. That such a document should be witnessed by Paul Rodgers of the British Intelligence will, I am sure, appeal to the Wilhelmstrasse. They will certainly not question its authenticity. Probably I shall be complimented." Krauss grinned. "Now, Fräulein, I'm sure you are ready to lower those attractive hands of yours and return to the desk to complete the signature so rudely interrupted."

"Even if you get the document, Krauss, that doesn't mean that you get the ships," said Rodgers, standing aside as Hélène moved obediently toward the desk.

"Germans have the advantage of being methodical in their plans," chuckled Krauss. "Already in Athens our agents are waiting to pay the money to Dmitri Coukidis, and take over the ships. Dmitri Coukidis will do as he is told as soon as he receives a certain telegram signed by his adored daughter and son. When I am satisfied that the deal is complete, I shall place no further obstacles in the way of your resuming your journey in the Orient Express, which again passes through Trieste tomorrow."

HÉLÈNE, white-faced, had taken the pen. She was about to dip it into the heavy inkwell, when she caught a glance from Rodgers. She bent her head over the document. In his eagerness, Krauss made a step forward. The next moment she had turned, and the heavy inkwell was flung by her, full in the face of the Nazi agent.

Simultaneously, Rodgers had dived for the big feet of his man. The gun exploded, and a bullet went into the ceiling. Krauss came crashing heavily to the carpet. He presented a pitiable object as Rodgers seized the gun. Ink was stream-



ing down his face, and had mixed with a streak of blood.

"Bravo!" nodded Rodgers, busy with a curtain-cord on the wrists of his prisoner. "A magnificent throw, mademoiselle."

"I don't read silly espionage novels," said the furious Hélène, looking down on the spluttering German. "But it may interest you to know, Herr Krauss, that I've seen many a custard pie thrown in the movies. You ought to go more often to see them."

Krauss only spluttered his fury as Simon Coukidis joined Rodgers in safely binding the prisoner to a chair. During this operation, Hélène took up the document and began to tear it into small pieces.

"No time to lose!"

The commanding voice of Rodgers interrupted this proceeding.

"Are you ready?" he added.

"If you mean for dinner, I've already dined, thank you. It was over the dinner-table that I learned to hate the face of Karl Krauss."

"So much the better if you've dined," decided Rodgers. "Put on that wretchedly expensive fur coat of yours, and come along."

"Where are we going?"

"To Athens, by boat. The ship sails at midnight."

Hélène Coukidis drew herself up.

"I refuse. I will not travel in any filthy steamer."

"It happens to be one owned by your father."

"All the more reason why I should stay here, spend a comfortable night, and catch the Orient Express tomorrow evening. I have a good deal of baggage with me, too."

There was a challenging glint in her dark eyes. Rodgers squared his jaw. He had a sudden desire to fling that inkwell back at her. But he restrained himself. He shrugged, sat down in a chair and took out a cigarette.

"Very well, then," he said, quietly. "Let us sit here and amuse ourselves until the police come to capture your brother and take him back to the cell from which I rescued him. I also have the suspicion that instead of spending a night in the hotel, you will really experience an uncomfortable night in an Italian prison cell. And I have no desire to get myself into further trouble on your behalf."

Her rouged lips tightened. She was about to storm at this lithe figure who attracted her so violently and yet calmly ignored her advances. But at this moment her brother, in excited Greek, intervened.

"Let's get away, Hélène, while we can."

Coldly she addressed Rodgers.

"At least you will allow me time to change into a traveling-frock?"

He looked at his watch.

"We haven't two minutes to spare," he said. "And even Adam, I suspect, had to wait longer than two minutes for Eve to change."

SHE flung the magnificent furs over her shoulders.

"I think you're the most detestable man I ever met in my life," she snarled.

"I'm sure Krauss agrees with you," chuckled Rodgers as, with a parting nod to the pinioned Nazi agent, he opened the door, switched off the lights, and ushered the Greek couple into the corridor. He took the precaution of leaving a card swinging on the doorknob of the suite: "*Not to be disturbed.*"

As they descended by the elevator into the lobby of the hotel, he once again approached the reception-clerk.

"Herr Krauss gives strict orders that he is not to be disturbed until the morning. He has a slight headache. Will you see that he has breakfast at eight? Coffee and rolls, and plenty of butter?"

"Certainly, *mein Herr.*"

Rodgers started away, then turned.

"And one more thing. Mademoiselle Coukidis requests that her baggage be placed aboard the Orient Express tomorrow and consigned to Athens. Herr Krauss has kindly consented to settle her account."

"Very good, *mein Herr.*"

With a parting nod, Rodgers strolled out of the lobby. He jumped into the car where his two passengers were impatiently awaiting him. Some whispered words to the driver, and they drove at full speed toward the docks.

In a few minutes they arrived alongside the ship that Rodgers had glimpsed through the windows of the Orient Express on entering Trieste. The passengers were saying their last farewells. Officials were already walking away from the gangway and leaving it to be dismantled by the sailors. A warning siren was sounded.

RODGERS had some final instructions for the driver.

"Go as fast as you can to the Yugoslav frontier. At the frontier post you will find a red-faced captain with a stern manner. He will interrogate you. All you have to do is to hand him this sealed envelope. Then you return to Trieste. You understand?"

"*Sì, signor.*"

"And here is a hundred lire for yourself. Off you go!"

"*Grazia, signor.*"

The delighted driver snicked his gears and set off with the powerful car in the direction of the frontier. He did not know that police cars were already leaving Trieste in full pursuit of him.

"I am curious to know what was in that letter," said Simon Coukidis, as Rodgers hurried him and his sister towards the gangway.

"Just a blank sheet of paper," smiled Rodgers.

"But who is the red-faced captain with the stern manner?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but my experience of frontiers proves that there is usually such a captain, whatever the country."

They had reached the barrier of the gangway. An official hurried forward irritably at these last delaying passengers.

"Passports and tickets!" he grunted.

"Left them aboard," said Rodgers hurriedly. "In fact, after seeing your de-

lightful city, all I have in my possession is this—to which you are welcome.”

He pressed a hundred-lira note upon the official.

It was sufficient.

“*Grazia, signor*, and a good voyage.”

The gangway was lifted behind them as they stepped aboard. Rodgers gave a glance at the fur-swathed figure who had been silent since they left the hotel. There were tears of mortification in her dark eyes.

He sighed.

THIRTY hours later, the aging Dmitri Coukidis sat in his office overlooking the busy port of Piræus. He nodded his head. He had just received a telephone notification from his bank that he was richer by half a million pounds.

“The ships now belong to Britain,” he said, in his tired voice to Paul Rodgers, who confronted him. “May I wish the Allies a swift and successful conclusion to the war.”

Rodgers drew his lean form from the chair and also gazed out of the window. Along the waterfront he saw three steamers. The blue and white Greek flags were being lowered, and the Union Jack fluttered in their place. He saw the burly forms of British mercantile marine officers taking over the command of these ships. Simultaneously, he knew that a similar act was taking place in Alexandria and at Istanbul. Radio messages were being flashed to ships at sea. The fleet that was once the pride of shrewd Dmitri Coukidis, was now under orders direct from the British Admiralty.

“But I have also my personal thanks to convey to you,” said Dmitri Coukidis. “Only by your efforts am I able to welcome home again the joy of my heart, my daughter and my son.”

The old Greek was holding out his grayed hand in thanks. Rodgers took it, and at the same time glanced at that fur-swathed back which had been persistently turned upon him since he rushed her aboard the steamer at Trieste. It had been a cold and uncomfortable journey across the Adriatic. Hélène Coukidis was still in that flimsy black evening frock which she wore when Rodgers ruthlessly dragged her away from the wily Krauss.

She turned. Her dark eyes rested challengingly upon the lithe form with the tanned face and inscrutable eyes.

“Perhaps Mr. Rodgers would honor us, papa, by dining at our home this eve-

ning? It is full moon tonight, and if he so desired he could see the Acropolis by moonlight. It is the most beautiful thing we could show him in Athens.”

Rodgers sighed, and shook his head.

“Alas, much as I would like to,” he said, “I’m afraid I must decline. I have work to do.”

“Are you afraid?” she challenged.

“There are some adventures which the wise man does not enter upon,” he replied, cryptically.

“But at least you are staying in Athens?”

“For the moment, yes.”

“Then we shall meet again.”

She had recovered some of her confidence. There was a sureness in her femininity as she held out her hand. She realized that his rejection of her invitation was in itself, a victory. To Rodgers she was, once again, the alluring Victory of Samothrace.

“It may be that we shall meet again,” he said, quietly.

“Then, *au revoir*,” she smiled.

And with a last flirtatious gleam of those dark eyes, she released him.

HALF an hour later, Rodgers went through the foyer of the Hotel Grande Bretagne. Grouping themselves apart from the medley of French, British, Italian and Greek personages who passed to and fro, were three bullet-headed Germans.

Each one lowered a copy of a German newspaper as he sauntered in.

Rodgers hesitated, and stopped before the most military-looking of the trio.

“You are, of course, awaiting Herr Krauss?” he said, in German.

The military-looking man registered surprise but, after a glance at his two companions, nodded:

“*Ja!*”

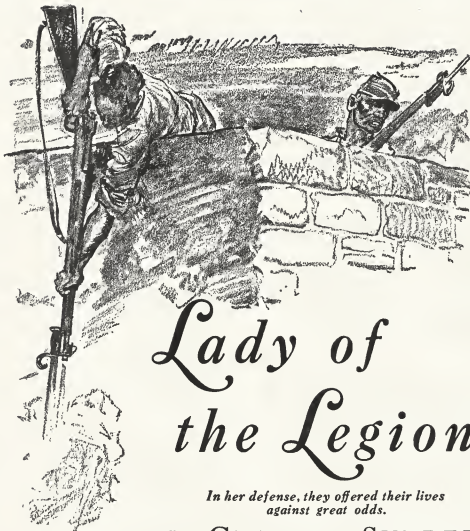
“I have a message from him,” went on Rodgers easily.

“So?”

“He will arrive in the Orient Express within the next hour. He particularly asks that you have sent up to his room a tray of coffee and rolls, and plenty of butter. You understand, plenty of butter.”

“It shall be done, *mein Herr*,” said the German, impressed and rising.

“And please see that it is given to him with the compliments of Paul Rodgers,” nodded the red-haired man—and with a parting smile, his lithe figure passed through the door into the dining-room.



Lady of the Legion

*In her defense, they offered their lives
against great odds.*

By GEORGES SURDEZ

The Story Thus Far:

"LEGIONNAIRE, did you hear a shot, awhile ago? Very far away?" asked young Torval. "I heard a pop, Lieutenant. But as I saw no flash, I didn't want to wake up everybody. Sometimes a rock cools off fast and splits. That makes a pretty loud crack."

But the private was not responsible for Post Moziba, a few square yards of sand surrounded by ineffective walls, occupied by but twenty-eight Legionnaires, close to a hostile zone swarming with tribesmen to whom guns and cartridges were more precious than gold.

Torval went back into his hot room. And then—a shot, and the sentry's cry: "*Aux armes—alerte—aux armes!*"

Torval leaped up the narrow stairway leading to the machine-gun platform.

"Why did you shoot? What made you call out?"

"I heard a shot, Lieutenant. Then I heard somebody inside our wire."

Torval sent up a rocket, and by its light spied several figures running a short distance outside the wire. A spot of fire blinked; the crack of a rifle followed. The Legionnaires opened fire, and the strangers scuttled down the incline, vanished in the dry bed of the arroyo. Silence now, and darkness.

"I could find out something in a couple of minutes, Lieutenant," said Corporal Rochas. "I spotted one of them that fell in the wire. How about letting me down with a rope?"

Torval gave the order. Five minutes later the Legionnaires hauled up the unconscious figure of a wounded girl.

Next day, restored under the care of a native woman, she told a strange story: "I am Louise Sauvain. I was born in Oran. I lived there until I was seven



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

years old. Then my father, who had been employed on the railroad, lost his job. We moved to Morocco, my father, my mother and me. My father became a trader among the soldiers. The Chleuhs surprised us, killed my father, took my mother and me as slaves.

"We were not badly treated. After a while, my mother became the wife of an important man. She wanted to send me back, to be French, but they would not let her write. Then, one day, she died.

"My mother's master said I was his property. And a price of eight hundred dourous was offered for me. That was much money for a woman. I had seen the man. I said he was too old to wed. He is an *agha*, you know, a chief among chiefs. But he walks bent like a broken stick, and he has a white beard, so long, and his mouth has no teeth."

Later that day a deputation of Arabs arrived and demanded the girl; they said

her story was untrue, that she was an Arab. Torval refused to give her up; and the Arabs replied that they would come with thrice five hundred men, and destroy this little French outpost. That night the Legionnaires made ready for attack. (*The story continues in detail.*)

THEY filed up the stairways. Torval waited until the yard was cleared, then followed them, taking his

station on the platform. So far as he could think, he had prepared for effective defense.

The task of defending four sides with twenty-nine men, and seven of those needed to handle the machine-gun and automatics, was not as formidable as it seemed. Certain angles of approach were covered by natural obstacles. For instance, the north side, just behind the wire, dropped a sheer forty feet, and the loose soil rendered a climb almost impossible, even during the day. The eastern side had a similar but lesser barrier, thirty feet of sharp slope.

THE storming parties would probably come in a drive for the southwest angle. Torval did not expect them to be supplied with tools that would bite through steel wire; and getting through the wire would take effort and time. The Lieutenant had seen automatic weapons fired at close range into massed attackers before. He felt that nothing could withstand an automatic's blast at a few feet.

The great danger was elsewhere: His men were so few that casualties would be felt immediately.

He placed the rocket-pistol within reach. He must not fire it until he was sure they were very close, so that the fire support from the outside would be aimed high to avoid hitting the attackers. From time to time he rested his elbows on the parapet, listened intently.

The open ground outside must be acrawl with men by now. They were progressing during the wind's blasts. He imagined them easily, separated in groups of twenty or twenty-five, each group led by a tested man. The first wave would be half-nude, armed with knives and clubs. Few pistols, for one-hand weapons are not popular among Saharans, being very hard to provide with ammunition and useless as hunting-guns. There would be about one hundred and fifty men in that first line, he figured, as many as could maneuver with ease in the available space.

With all hands on the walls, the sentries had ceased their pacing. The *goumiers* had taken most of the animals with them. No one was below, no one except the girl. There was not a sound to be heard from the buildings.

Then Torval distinguished a single point of light, the glowing tip of a cigarette. Holzhauser was smoking. But as he was screened from the outside, that did not matter.



Was she awake?

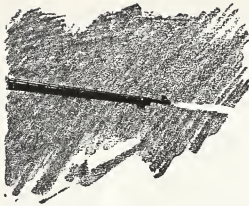
That was not sure. If she had been different, she might have been imagined wringing her hands, crying. But she never cried from fear, wept only from hurt, humiliation. She had the fatalism of Moorish women: What is written is written; one dies only at the appointed hour.

A light touch on his arm: Charanov held up his arm, showing him the luminous dial of his wrist-watch: Three-seven.

Perhaps they would not come tonight. Blameni might have spoken the truth. Or perhaps Moulay had decided that allowing them to stand an entire night of useless vigilance, the second night would find them relaxed. Moulay was not hard pressed for time. If he succeeded tomorrow night, or even on the night following, he would still have three days to retreat into the far desert, where no French forces could follow him without long and careful preparations. For the void of the unknown was behind the natives, the almost uncharted reaches sweeping southwest toward Mauritania.

Torval's thoughts wandered, despite all his efforts, behind the closed door of the present emergency: Death. . . . Suppose he did not die? What would be done with him? He did not have to fear prison. There was a sentence foreseen for rebellious officers, but ordinarily resignation disarmed the army authorities. How would his family accept his action?

His people were relatively well-off. But the money was needed for—he had a younger sister, unmarried, to be provided with a dowry. And his father, who had served as a battalion-commander during the war, had acquired a high regard for discipline. The women were kind, loving, admirable. But still they were



women, Frenchwomen. To them, Louise would be a half-savage female over whom he had lost his head, wrecked his career. Had he not been concerned, they would have loved her, taught her. But as soon as he was involved, they would bristle.

He tried to cast himself back in the past: What would he have thought of what he was doing, when in military school? When in lycée? What would his former classmates think of him, when they learned of his foolish behavior? Because, he realized, he could talk all he wished to, later, if he survived; but his motives would not be sought in a chivalrous principle, but in some queer, impulsive passion. And Louise was not an argument against that belief. She was beautiful enough for a man to lose his head over her.

And what would become of her? Would he, as Charanov claimed, feel responsible and care for her? How? What sort of employment could he find, a cashiered army lieutenant? Suppose she turned out to be, as now seemed probable, a native, or a half-caste? Would he, like Charanov, resort to manual labor?

Charanov had been very wealthy as a youth, as many Russians in the Legion could remember; but when he had gone on the beach, in Tunisia, with the remnants of Wrangel's White Army, he had known miserable months. Then he had emerged, was happy enough—

The wind died down for seconds.

And in the lull, an undefined rumor persisted, seemed to continue the giant rustle. Brusquely there came a sharp, metallic snap, the striking of a blade on a stone. They were coming!

Now he could hear continuous, multiplied scrapings, scratchings, as if a swarm of moles were tunneling the sand. The leading men had attained the wire, were

feeling their way through it. They were not using clippers, for the tools made an unmistakable sound which would have been hard to muffle.

Probably they were sliding underneath the barbed maze, propping up each strand carefully. A wooden prop under one wire, the stretch of a groping hand to the next, a slide forward: Six inches. Another prop under the next wire: Six more inches. Being desert men, they knew that the sounds they made were audible, that the Legionnaires were watchful, waiting for them with loaded guns.

Yet they worked on in, doggedly, with the machine-gun, the automatics, the rifles and grenades ahead. Courageous though they were, their hearts must be pounding within their ribs! Beating so hard that Torval imagined he could hear them.

The Legionnaires heard, as he did. But not one stirred, not one spoke. Their steadiness matched that of the primitives. They were Europeans, for the majority, and achieved through discipline what the others did because of life-long training and inherited instinct.

Torval drew a deep breath.

"Fire!"

And he pressed the trigger of the rocket-pistol.

IT was as if he had set off a mine, for the whole world exploded in a flash. Flames licked out from the walls, and even before the rocket bloomed above, the darting stabs of fire lighted the scene. The machine-gun trepidated at maximum speed; the two automatics slashed back and forth from the angles. Hundreds of rifles returned the discharges from outside; the air was alive with metal.

Then the raw, sinister light spilled through the sky. Torval swept the enclosure with a glance, seeing fifty scenes in one. The enemy was visible everywhere, in clusters among the wires, in scurrying groups beyond it. The natives were shouting, not a coherent battle-cry, but prolonged, shrill howling. Grenades started to explode, with peculiar, glassy explosions and blinding spurts of yellowish flame.

Then, in that unreal glare, Torval saw something he did not understand at first, a miraculous sight that made his hair bristle on his skull: Naked men seemed to run from the open, leap high into the air—and then progress swiftly in what

appeared a level flight, skimming the very top of the spiny strands.

"Machine-gun, bear right!"

THE long, gleaming barrel jerked sharply, the speed of the detonations increased: And the flying men were knocked out of the air; they tumbled, struggled about with wild cries, arms waving and legs kicking. The explanation was simple: The attackers had made a pathway on top of the wire, by throwing mats, tent-rugs, faggots and blankets. But the improvised bridge sagged and sank, as the weight accumulated in spots.

The officer fired a second rocket.

He was the only man erect on the platform, and the bullets sought him in swarms. There was a welcome second of darkness between the two flares, a black space filled with immense clamor. When the flood of light returned, the tips of poles were pointing over the wall, and the nearest men to them leaned flat along the parapet, priming grenades which they dropped below with a flick of the wrist.

A sharp explosion in the yard. At first, Torval thought that someone had dropped a grenade. But a warning shout lifted, as other objects hurled high:

"Look out! They've got grenades!"

It was true: The attackers were using explosives, and not homemade bombs, from the sound. But fortunately, the handling of grenades needs a certain skill; and so eager were the Saharans to get rid of the dangerous objects that they threw them too soon, and those that landed on the wall-path or the platform could be kicked into space, in time.

As always in a m \acute{e} l \acute{e} e, men seemed to have minds for everything, eyes that missed nothing. The fear of death quickens a brave man's reactions. And as always, some individuals showed up better than others. Men reputed to be slow and unintelligent suddenly became swift and crafty. Torval, between shots from his pistol, caught sight of a lout named Klautz performing a series of gestures as precisely as if he had rehearsed them.

He drove his fist into the face of a native scaling a pole, pushed that pole with enough strength to knock it—and the two bodies clinging to it—to one side, dropped a grenade from his left hand, turned as gracefully as a pelota player, picked up a grenade that had rolled between his feet, and flipped it into the space outside before it could explode. . . .

Darkness. Machine-gun and automatics continued to slash back and forth for thirty seconds; a few more grenades exploded. Then, without orders, the firing slackened, stopped. As movement was heard outside, moans, scattered detonations started again. This lasted for perhaps five minutes. Then the men caught in the wire either died or learned to keep still.

"Everyone low, behind the parapet," Torval called. He crouched himself, before firing the third rocket. There were men hanging in the strands, like currants on a twig. And a number of bodies could be seen in the open. Two or three bullets spattered against the wall; more whined overhead. Then darkness, silence.

Charanov had inspected the groups rapidly, and reported: "Nobody seriously hurt, Lieutenant. Three face-wounds, one shoulder, and any number of scratches. All can carry on."

"Nice job," Torval commented.

"Yes. Good idea, that coming on top!" The Sergeant chuckled. "Funniest thing I've seen in many years. But they've done what was expected of the first try: The wire is pretty badly chopped up—our grenades, and theirs. If they can clear a lane through it and keep pouring, they'll be up here."

"Uncoil some wire and dump it at the base of the wall in long spirals," Torval suggested. "They didn't see it there before, and it will surprise them."

SIX men were sent to the store-dumps below to bring up the coiled wire. The corporal in charge of them returned almost at once. Torval heard him chuckle as he approached.

"Say, Lieutenant—"

"Yes—here I am."

"One of those things that blew up in the yard hit Holzhauser a good clip below the knee. I put a bandage on it—no bones smashed. But he can only hobble around." He laughed aloud. "He looked like the safest man here, and he's the only one really hurt. We brought out a bench from the dormitory for him to sit on. You ought to go down and have a look at him, Lieutenant, sitting there with a crate full of grenades, like he was selling eggs."

Torval took the suggestion, spoke a few words to the old fellow. Up on the wall, he could hear the metallic sounds as the coils of wire were loosened, dumped on the dangerous side. The

pulley at the well creaked cheerfully; men passed with full canvas buckets. He struck his fist against the girl's door.

"Jean," he announced. He heard the hinges creak, discerned her dimly in the doorway: "It's over for a few minutes. Nobody's badly hurt. Cigarette?" He struck a match, held it for her. "Looks as if we might make out all right."

"How many did you kill?"

"Don't know. There must be fifteen or twenty in the wire—some at the foot of the wall. Counted nine or ten outside."

"Thirty-five or forty." She sighed, and added with ruthless truth: "They are more than one thousand." Then, without transition: "I have made tea." And she brought him a tin cup full of the syrupy, mint-flavored fluid. "May I come out, Jean? It is hard in there, not knowing, with all the shooting and yelling."

"Holzhauser got hurt in the yard. Better stay in."

He reached out in the darkness, pressed her shoulder with his palm. Then he went to the wireless-shack, found the operator there before him.

"News?"

"I'm giving them a buzz, to find out if anything was sent while I was on the wall." The Legionnaire took the slip that Torval had just scribbled, a terse official report of the first attack: "Right, Lieutenant. I'll send it."

Then a few shots slapped out from the wall, and the officer ran to the platform. The Legionnaires were shooting at men groaning in the wire. This appeared inhuman, at first; but as they could not be brought in, treated and held as prisoners, it proved more merciful. These shots brought more, from the skirmishers scattered in the open, watching for targets.

"Three - fifty - one," Charanov announced. "They should try again soon, as light starts at about five."

When the wind dropped, the heat grew suffocating, and the air was heavy with odors. The cooling machine-gun on its tripod, the piles of empty cartridges, exhaled their reek of hot metal and burnt powder. Smells drifted in from the outside, human smells, of sweaty, unwashed bodies. Somewhere a camel let loose its hissing bellow; mules brayed.

"Reinforcements, Lieutenant," Charanov opined. "Coming into the palm-grove. If we only had a thirty-seven-caliber cannon, we could—"

"Why not wish for a battalion of Legion, while you're at it?" Torval concluded lightly. They laughed together.



Then Torval called the men back to stations. Thirty minutes had elapsed, and if another attack was due tonight, it must come soon. If they lived until daylight, they would be safe for a full day. But neither held onto hope that the natives had given their full measure.

The radio-operator came from below: "Sent that report, Lieutenant. They wanted to know why you signed it, when Sergeant Charanov is supposedly in charge."

"Bah, let them worry."

Torval had forgotten the small matter that he had been displaced as commander. There would be so many things to straighten out—if and when!

"Here they come," someone called out.

This time, the natives did not attempt to avoid discovery; the rumor of their advance was plain. Rifle-fire from the outside broke out afresh, intense and better aimed than before. Many of the missiles smacked against the wall; many others slashed at the level of the parapet.

The machine-gun opened fire; then, one somewhat after the other, the automatics. The wire was being attacked in a dozen spots at once, wooden uprights broken, metal supports pulled from the ground. The Saharans were howling encouragement to each other, and even the new coils they stumbled into at the bottom of the wall did not stop them. How beings of flesh could flounder about through the jagged spikes and keep to one purpose was hard to understand. But the scaling-poles juttred over the wall, were propped in place; men started swarming up the cross-cleats.



Being desert men, they knew the sounds they made were audible; yet they worked on in doggedly.

Legionnaires had to stop tossing grenades. They picked up the rifles and fought with bayonet and butt, catching the assailants before they gained a firm footing, knocking them off balance. But they were too few to guard every foot of frontage; the enemy was probing, discovering safer spots.

"Keep your stations, keep your stations—"

The combat was continued in the darkness, for Torval hesitated to illuminate the crest of the wall, fearing that the marksmen outside would shoot into the struggling groups. There was a very faint light, the dim glow of the stars, and at close range it was possible to discern friends from foes. But one group of attackers was no sooner disposed of than another one bobbed elsewhere. Both Charanov and the officer ran along the footpath, a sort of a flying reserve, intervening with pistol and club.

"Watch your frontage—steady!"

The action split into separate factions at four or five spots along the wall. The three men guarding the north face were forced to leave their assigned spots to help.

During those desperate moments the Legionnaires performed unrecorded feats of strength and courage. They were not working for medals or promotion, or for the pride of their corps, but fighting for their lives. The tribesmen, who served both their racial hatred and their masters, brought a long-pent-up savagery to the engagement. It was seldom that they had the chance to come so close.

"Watch your frontage—steady—"

The Legionnaires' instinct was to group, to get back to back. Torval knew that this meant the finish, for the attackers would overflow into the yard,

come up the stairways, be everywhere at once. Luckily for the defenders, the natives could not know where and when they had a genuine advantage, could not profit by the temporary "holes" they pierced.

The machine-gun's crew and the auto-riflemen kept at their job. But there was no knowing whether they were finding targets now. Torval made his way back to the platform, groped for the rocket-pistol on the lid of the ammunition-coffer. As he leaned over, he was struck in the side of the head, the blow kindling whirling wheels of sputtering flames in his brain.

He fell on all fours; men tumbled across his back. His fingers caught on a bare ankle. Hard heels beat against his shoulder. He had to let go. New cries were rising, howls of pain and terror. Then, unexpectedly, there was silence.

A SECOND later he heard Sergeant Chapuis' voice, sobbing hysterically, laughing and weeping at one time: "Eh—eh! They tried to grab the machine-gun! Eh—eh—did they jump!"

From the barrel, glowing red, spread a stench of searing meat.

"Post One?" Charanov's voice snapped out.

"Present, Sergeant."

The noncom checked off the posts, then: "Holzhauser?"

"All well down here, Sergeant."

"Where the hell did they go?" Charanov muttered. He was returning from a swift inspection of the wall. He helped Torval to his feet. The officer's left cheek ached, felt as large as a pumpkin. Blood was dripping down his neck. A gash stung high on his thigh. "Where the hell are they?" the Sergeant repeated.

Then he added: "Some damage this time, Lieutenant. Four missing."

Four from thirty: Twenty-six!

NEVERTHELESS, Torval was relieved. He had believed that half his men were down. Only two bodies were located; the other two must have dropped outside. Men were drinking from the buckets, in long, audible gulps.

"Where did they go?" Torval said in his turn.

The natives had fled from the wall, had given up the attack. One moment, there had been fifty of them so near to success that they had left flesh roasting on the machine-gun's barrel. Then they had melted into space.

They could not have gone very far, that was sure. But they had granted the defenders a tacit truce. A truce which neither side seemed ready to break. But Torval's duty was to make sure.

He leaned over the parapet.

Fifteen feet from his face, a gun was fired; the flash blinded him for an instant. He felt prickling burns digging into his chin. Of course, they were down below, hugging the bottom of the wall, huddled helplessly against the bricks, waiting, waiting for they knew not what. They had been gripped by one of the sudden panics that overcome the bravest men at times.

And now they must be hopeless: While in greater numbers, they had failed to storm the wall. Why should they try again? And they did not dare dash into the broken barbed wire. Nevertheless, they must be driven out, away.

"Grenades," Torval called.

He dropped the first. Then the explosions crashed out all along the wall. The cowed men dashed off, across the network of wire, leaping and screaming. The automatic weapons rattled into them; the riflemen picked up their guns, fired at maximum speed.

The last shadowy silhouette vanished or lay still.

"That should hold them a while," Charanov expressed the general thought.

But he was wrong.

Before ten minutes had passed, the sound of running men rose again. There was no effort at concealment; solid waves appeared in the open two hundred yards away, heading straight into the machine-gun bursts. The wire entanglement had been wrecked in several places, and the galloping men spouted into those lanes slashed by the two preceding attacks.

The scaling-poles reappeared; the mad scenes of a few minutes before were repeated. One of the automatics, overheated, jammed, and the machine-gun went out of action for several seconds: Charanov, who had been firing, had dropped out with a shattered jaw.

The Lieutenant fired a rocket.

Tribesmen were spilling over the zone where the wire had been, like a moving, multicolored carpet. They trampled the fallen in their eagerness to reach the wall. It was a nightmare vision of muscular backs, shaven skulls, bristling steel, with here and there an uplifted face, contorted mouth, foamy beard:

"*Ya, Rebbi!*"

They were calling upon God. The shout was a prayer and an imprecation, an appeal for life and an acceptance of death. The whole desert surged against the strangers. Skilled preachers had lashed these men for hours, reviling them for their cowardliness, their helplessness before a handful of the Roumi's soldiers. For the moment, they were hypnotized, heedless of pain, danger and death.

Behind the first mass trotted another, and a third behind that one—two, three, four hundred men—

Five hundred and five hundred more! Moulay was keeping his word.

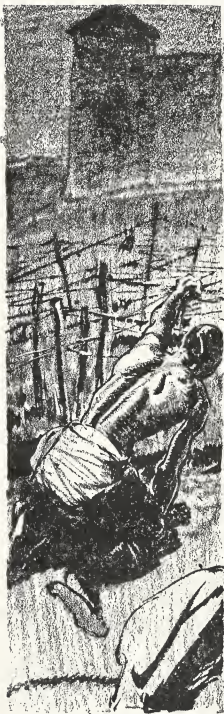
BLAMENI might stand at dawn where he had announced he would stand, very close to the gateway. But those inside would be dead. The young officer realized that he had known from the first that it was only a question of time, provided Kaid Moulay was ready to sacrifice enough lives. The affair had progressed, he now understood, strictly according to plan. The first two attacks had been feelers, one to probe the resources of the defense, ascertain the play of the automatic weapons; the next had sought to destroy the wire in wide paths; and this third one was to finish the task.

"*Ya, Rebbi!*"

The machine-gunners had swung the muzzle of the weapon parallel to the wall, and raked its length, hacking off the men on the climbing-poles. But it was simply a matter of two, three minutes, before a group gained a foothold and came rushing toward the platform. The young officer hesitated for a moment longer. Then he shouted to Charanov:

"Hold them back! I'm going below."

He had often speculated, in the past, on what his thoughts would be at this precise moment. Other men had done



what he was about to do, many others. And after the proper sequence of events, it appeared the most normal, the least melodramatic of incidents. There were cases of rifles, cartridges and explosives below. Long ago, long before he had known Moulay except as one name in a long list of regional chieftains, before he

had known that Louise existed, he had made preparations.

It was fated that Kaid Moulay would conquer this emplacement before morning. Torval and his men had done what was possible. Two or three lives had paid for each one that would be lost. Moulay would win himself a hole in the ground, and nothing more.

As Torval ran down the stairway, his mind was already detached from the present, from the fierce tumult, the cries and the shots. What remained to do was very simple. A few quick strides across the yard, the touching of a match's flame to the tip of a fuse. After that, it would not be long—four or five seconds.

Perhaps he would have time to turn around, to glance upward, to see the attackers flooding over the crest of the wall. He would know that their triumph was their doom; then all would be over.

TORVAL pressed his palms against the sand and tried to push himself erect.

But he fell flat again, and gasped with pain. His lungs seemed to have contracted inside his chest; he was suffocating. Before his eyes floated a reddish, unreal mist. The last he remembered was that a tremendous conflagration had overwhelmed him, that he had been lifted from the ground. That had been hours ago, an endless stretch of dark time. Then he became aware of many impacts, as if solid objects were raining down all about him. Débris, falling back out of the sky. . . .

Therefore it had been seconds, not hours. He had exploded the magazine, blown up the Post—and he was still alive! Brusquely his thoughts shaped clearly: No, he had not reached the fuse—he had been in the yard when the conflagration had come. And through that persisting red haze, he saw the outline of the nearest building, straight, unbroken, against the paling sky. He had not done what he had come to do. What had happened?

He gained his feet, unsteadily, reeled two or three steps. He felt that he had to clutch at his reason, to hold on to each thought. He had started to blow up the Post. There had been an explosion, which he had not caused. He must carry out that intention now.

But what did this sudden, complete stillness mean? For an instant, the thought that he had died, that this was *after*, stirred an odd form of terror in his brain—a fear that he was alone, alone!

But the débris which had thumped down around him was real enough. He turned with an effort, looked up at the crest of the wall. Silhouettes were stirring up there, against the growing light. For day was breaking, as if that formidable blast had shaken the very sun from behind the horizon.

A man came down the stairway from the platform, teeth shining whitely in a brown, dusty mask—a Legionnaire, in a shredded tunic bloodstained at the shoulder. And this apparition spoke, spoke with Charanov's voice.

"What happened, Lieutenant?" and he stared from Torval's face to the buildings a few feet behind him, the buildings that were intact.

"I don't know, Charanov. I started down to—"

"I know. Then everything blew up. I thought—"

"Where are they?"

"Those that could run away, Lieutenant. I don't understand it. One moment, they were here—and—" Charanov rambled on, repeating the same sentences over and over, in a flat, mechanical voice, like that from a phonograph record when the needle sticks. Shock, that was it. "Those that could, ran away, Lieutenant. I don't understand it—"

Torval limped back up the stairs. On the platform, dazed men stared at him, unbelievably. He looked over the wall, saw a great patch of yellowish, fresh sand, from which jutted bits of wood, twisting wire, boulders.

Beyond was the slope, the open ground as far as the palm-grove, with a few bodies scattered about. Nothing moved. The living were out of sight. The sun was coming up. A day was gained.

"The roll, Chapuis," he said.

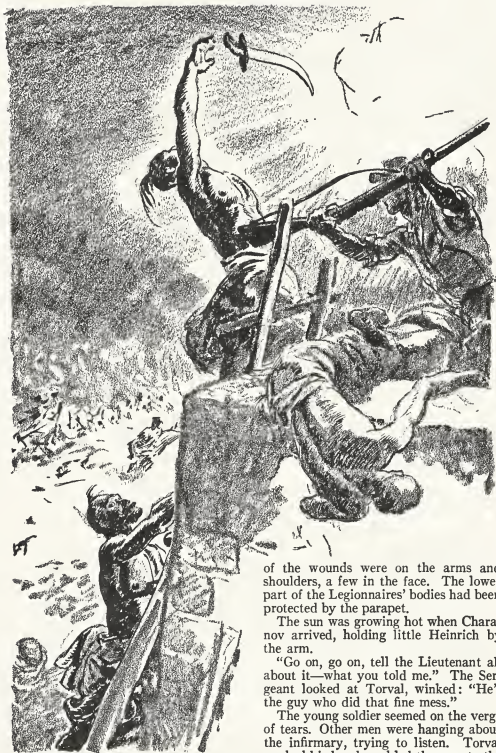
"Sergeant Chapuis's badly hurt, Lieutenant," a corporal said. He shouted the names, and nineteen men answered. With Torval and Charanov, that meant twenty-one survivors, twenty-one comparatively valid men. Seven dead during the night, with Sergeant Chapuis and another man too badly injured to stand.

NOW Torval was recovering rapidly. He gave the necessary instructions; the cooks went downstairs to make coffee. Everyone went back to routine chores, a bit unbelievably. Men moved about, lifting bodies and disposing of them over the parapet. What was the purpose of burying a few, with so many outside? Only one difference was made:



The natives were thrown over; the Legionnaires lowered carefully, assembled in one spot. If there was a chance, later, they would be honored according to tradition.

"Try to find out what caused that explosion," Torval ordered Charanov. "I'm going down to the ambulance-room."



The pharmacist-corporal sterilized instruments, and the officer set to work. The hardest job was Chapuis' wound. But within the next hour, practically every man dropped in, to have cuts washed out, painted and bandaged. Most

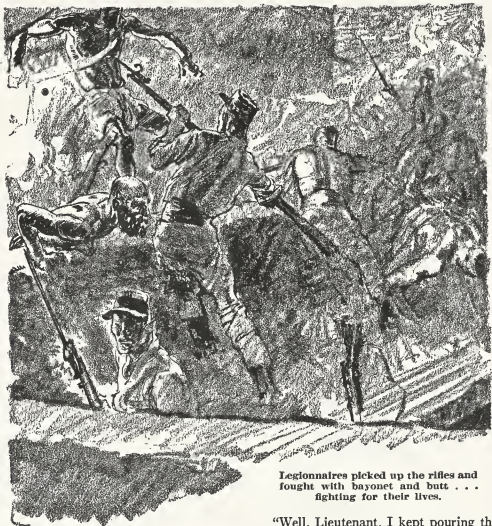
of the wounds were on the arms and shoulders, a few in the face. The lower part of the Legionnaires' bodies had been protected by the parapet.

The sun was growing hot when Charanov arrived, holding little Heinrich by the arm.

"Go on, go on, tell the Lieutenant all about it—what you told me." The Sergeant looked at Torval, winked: "He's the guy who did that fine mess."

The young soldier seemed on the verge of tears. Other men were hanging about the infirmary, trying to listen. Torval washed his hands and led the way to the office. The place was very quiet, and the slanting sun shot long rays between the slats of the blinds, rays in which the dust danced and swirled in a luminous fantasy.

"You know about the explosion, Legionnaire Buschjost? Speak."



Legionnaires picked up the rifles and fought with bayonet and butt . . . fighting for their lives.

"It was this way, Lieutenant," the lad started, standing at attention: "When I was magazine guard, I swiped some cartridges of dynamite. See, I had read in a book about safe-crackers in America cooking the stuff for nitroglycerin. This stuff we use is special for tropical use, and not awfully strong. I used the alcohol-burner in the pharmacy for it—"

Torval felt the skin of his scalp tighten: This chap had been experimenting with explosives, right in the Post!

"Don't you know that's dangerous?"

"Oh, no, Lieutenant. The stuff melts at eight centigrade, all right, but it won't blow up from heat until one hundred and eighty. That's almost twice the boiling point, you know, and I kept water at the same heat on the other burner. I'd turn everything off when the water started to simmer. No danger at all, Lieutenant."

"You amaze me, Buschjost. Go on."

"Well, Lieutenant, I kept pouring the stuff easy into a bottle, an old anisette bottle. I had about this much—" he indicated with his fingers. "Oh, I knew it would go off, so I was very careful, you know, not to leave it where it could be knocked around."

"Why did you want that stuff, Legionnaire?"

"I can't quite say, Lieutenant. I liked to look at it, and know that if I just dropped it, that stuff that looked like weak lemon extract could blow the whole dump up."

"Gave him a sense of power, he means, Lieutenant," Charanov declared. "He's a little Fritz, you know."

"Then I got some stuff out of a signal rocket, Lieutenant. And I rolled some of it in a paper, and floated it in the glycerine. I kept wondering, you know, if it would make a big red flash when it went off. I thought I might try it out some day, on patrol, tossing it down a cliff

somewhere. But I was sort of worried about putting that bottle in my pack, what with the heat from the sun. So I never got around to it. I kept a wooden box over it, with damp cloth inside, under my cot. Treated it the way we treat the stuff in the magazine, see. Then I got scared of it, and wanted to get rid of it, and didn't know how to do that."

"Yes, it was something of a problem," Torval conceded.

"Sometimes," little Heinrich admitted courageously, "I'd get almost wild, when the chaps in the barracks horseplayed and wrestled, and got too near my box. Then this business started, and I thought I could throw it outside, like a grenade. But I thought, too, that maybe it would make a lot more noise and that I'd get caught. But, this morning, when you started down the stairs, I knew what you intended to do. So I thought there'd be no harm, as long as we were going to go up anyway, in seeing about that red color." The young Legionnaire shrugged slightly as he added:

"It wasn't as bright as I expected."

TORVAL looked at the young fellow with mingled anger and admiration. Heinrich had been doing his job, like the others, fighting off attackers on the wall. But his mind had been clear enough to remember his bottle—safe under its wooden box—his curiosity powerful enough to make him wish to test his theory—with ten seconds of life remaining!

Moreover, from his proper station, several yards away from the platform, with armed Saharans hacking up at him, he had contrived to note, despite the poor light, that his chief was leaving for the yard, and to grasp at once what the purpose was.

"How old are you, Heinrich Buschjost?"

"I enlisted at eighteen. I'm almost twenty-one, Lieutenant."

"Your real age? In confidence."

"Eighteen in October, Lieutenant."

The officer brought out a small book, consulted it.

"Theft of Government property: Five years. Tampering with government property: Five years." Torval looked up at the Legionnaire. Little Heinrich was growing very pale. He had not been afraid of death, but court-martial frightened him. "Not to mention misuse of Government ammunition, endangering the common safety in a military outpost, use of explosives without orders or proper

qualifications. Let's say they'll run some of the charges together. You still can look for fifteen years in prison camp. Nothing to worry about; you'll be back in the Legion before you're thirty-five." He closed the book.

Heinrich Buschjost was scared but indignant.

"But, Lieutenant, everything was going to go up! That's what the natives thought, I'll bet, that the magazine had started to go, and that there would be a bigger explosion." He sputtered: "And—and you—Lieutenant—you were going to blow up the dump, anyway!"

"Something in that," Torval admitted. "Can you keep your mouth shut, Buschjost?"

"Oh, yes, Lieutenant."

"All right. . . . Sergeant Loffheim was killed, Chapuis disabled. I'll have to promote two corporals to sergeants. And two privates to corporals. You're one of them. And I'll send in a citation for you, something about your contributing to the saving of the Post." Torval rose and offered his hand. "But you promise me not to make any more experiments in chemistry here, and not to blow about what you did—I'd get into hot water for not reporting you."

Heinrich shook the hand warmly.

"It's a promise, Lieutenant. You have enough trouble coming as it is." He hesitated, then added shrewdly: "Maybe Sergeant Charanov had better sign the citation too?"

"Understood. Dismissed." When the Legionnaire had saluted and left, Torval turned to Charanov with a wry smile: "That little square-head never loses sight of anything, does he? Just the same, but for him, we'd all have blown up an hour or two ago."

"What's postponed isn't necessarily lost, Lieutenant," Charanov remarked, with a skeptical smile: "This morning or tonight, what matters?"

Torval shrugged and went to his room. The girl was seated on his couch. She had assembled another phenomenal costume out of the feminine garments left by Kheira and masculine garments located in the officer's trunk. But what would have been ridiculous on most women contrived to appear charming on her.

SHE cried out when he came in. And when he looked into the mirror he understood her alarm. His face was a mask of dirt, his chin covered by a blood-stained crust.

Torval reassured her briefly, and talked to her as he cleaned up.

She explained that the door had blown in at the time of the explosion, the forged-iron sockets torn right out of the walls. Yes, she had been frightened then, and before, also, when she had heard the war cries of Moulay's *ouled el qelt*. What were those? They were like the Legionnaires of the other side: picked men from various tribes, usually sent in at the last.

"By the way," Torval asked, as he applied a strip of tape over the cut on his face: "what's your name? All right, all right, you're French, real French! But you're not Louise Sauvain. I can't call you that. Are you Zaya?"

"That's my name, yes, among our people. But not my French name."

"And what is your French name?"

"It means nothing. Call me Zaya."

IN vain Torval pressed her for more details. He was coming to understand that Zaya, as he was to call her, had a remarkable ability to keep silent on the topics she selected. But he nevertheless found conversation with her entertaining. One thing was certain, she did not utter the banalities conventional among French girls. She did not admire at length the work of the latest literary idol. She had never met a tennis champion, a great actor, and she sincerely regarded a lieutenant of Legion as an important person.

He knew that the work he had ordered done would be carried on without his supervision: His men were Legionnaires. He knew that if anything unusual occurred, he would be called. So he sat with her, and they brewed thick coffee on his heater, smoked cigarettes, chatted. She found an illustrated magazine with advertisements for women's clothes, and asked him a hundred questions.

"What is that for? How do you put it on?" Once she startled him with a pertinent question: "What is bad taste?" having picked out the phrase from one of his explanations. "Is what I am wearing bad taste, Jean?"

"Not at all. It's—well, it's individual, original."

"What's the difference?"

"Suits your personality—the way you look—"

He talked on. . . .

Outside, in the shambles of the wire-maze, dead bodies were offered to the sun. Not forty feet away, Chapuis was sucking, through a glass pipe, beef tea made with cubes, while some hundreds



of yards farther, riflemen sprawled on the hot sand, nursing rifle-stocks to their cheeks, their eyes on the gutted post.

From the north and the east, still five or six days away, military units were approaching. And to replace these forces in the places they had left, companies, squadrons, battalions, were on the march, on motor-trucks, in trains, rushing southward. To replace these in turn, drafts were moving nearer the Sahara from Algerian garrisons.

While in this narrow room, decorated with queerly shaped weapons, hung with blue and white Soudanese drapes, a young lieutenant explained patiently the difference between bad taste and originality, in the matter of feminine dress, to a beautiful girl listening, lips parted in avid attention, seated cross-legged against the wall, holding a bare foot in both hands.

For when Zaya became interested, animated, she relaxed and showed the lack of self-consciousness, the suppleness of a Saharan woman. She would have much to learn before she could mix with European people without attracting attention. In Torval, as in most men, there lurked an unsuspected educator. And to only a few men has it ever been granted to be considered an absolute authority on any subject that was discussed.

"Sorry to disturb you, Lieutenant," Charanov stood in the door. He looked from Zaya to Torval, and when the Lieutenant nodded that he might speak, he went on casually: "Some women and a few kids are crawling around, pulling in the dead. Didn't want to order the men to shoot without asking you."



"Don't bother them as long as they don't come too close. As long as they're in sight, the others won't shoot."

"That's what I thought," Charanov agreed. "I sent a party out to string wire across that pit the nitro dug. There are planes coming up. Should I put out signal panels?"

"No need. They have our wireless report." Torval rose; but as Zaya was about to follow him: "Better not show yourself on the wall. Some of those prowlers are spies, and one of them might recognize you and shoot at you."

He was satisfied to find that the damage had not been considerable. Part of the nearer wall surface had crumbled. Three men were repairing it, and others were stretching glittering new wire. In the distance, groups of women and old men, with a few small children, wandered about. This was not an unusual sight after an encounter. Torval had seen it several times in Morocco: Moslems trying to locate their dead. When they drew too near, a single shout would drive them away again.

OTHER visitors arrived, identified themselves and were permitted near: Old women from the little Haratin village beyond the palm grove, coming to offer eggs, chickens and fruit for sale, as if nothing extraordinary were going on. The natives had allowed them to pass freely, they reported. There were many, many of them.

"The gullies are crowded," one of the crones declared. "Be careful. They say they cut your throats tonight, sure."

The throbbing of the motors had swelled to a roar, and three planes surged out of the northeast. They swooped low over the Post; the aviators could be seen waving their hands. Then they rose again, circled widely over the vast plateau, like circus-performers on parade, and set to work.

Small bombs dropped from beneath the fuselage, glistening in the sun like metallic flakes. After a series of explosions, the machines would swoop lower, and the coppery explosions of their heavy machine-guns hammered impressively. The theory was that the bombs, which knocked up geysers of sand and pebbles, and left great clouds of yellow smoke and dust, were to flush the game from cover, as targets for the bullets.

But to anyone who had served as an observer on a plane in the Sahara, results seemed doubtful. Aviation, a splendid weapon against visible, permanent structures and masses of troops forced to keep on roads, is not very effective against Saharans. The tribesmen have practiced camouflage from time immemorial, and for them it was a simple matter to move into patches of shadow, where they could not be spotted from on high.

The pilots had definite instructions not to fly too low. To a desert marksman, a plane was just like an enormous bird, and most of those primitive riflemen could drop a pigeon on the wing with a solid ball. Losing a machine worth several hundred thousand francs because of a cartridge worth fifty centimes would have been poor business.

Through the field-glasses, Torval saw one of these attacks on a fairly numerous party of men and animals, crossing the plateau some three miles away. The almost indistinct lines separated, spilled into scarcely visible blurred dots. The explosions of bombs dotted the soil in a straight line; the machines circled for five minutes. It seemed, for a moment, as if the whole bunch of tribesmen had been wiped out. But when the planes went elsewhere, everything was on the move again. Possibly, two or three pack-camels had been killed, too stupid to crouch when the bombs struck.

There was another fine display over the palm-grove. When the explosives struck the shallow pond there, spectacular spouts were kicked up above the leafage. Within the Post, the Legionnaires followed the air raid with many amused comments and shouts of glee. They quoted over and over again the famous remark of a native

questioned by an aviator, at the end of a Moroccan campaign. The pilot, indicating a bombing-machine, asked: "And, Akli, do you know what that is? Did you see any during the fighting?"

"Sure," the Moor retorted: "That's flying-machine. Make much noise, kill nobody."

Charanov watched the performance, a cigarette in the corner of his lips, hands in his breeches pockets: "The natives have camouflaged their main camp, sand-colored tents, and all that. I'd sooner see a detachment of the Erfoud Company of Legion shoving into sight than fifty of those damn' crates." He sighed, concluding: "Well, they'll get us tonight."

Torval nodded.

"They should. We haven't enough men left. Even if we made another nitro bomb, they wouldn't be fooled again. They thought the whole Post was going up—and ran. Tonight, they'll stick. Well, nothing to do except wait."

The planes had circled once more and were passing above the post in a triumphant procession. And on the roof of the storehouse, outlined in signal panels, two Legionnaires had marked an enormous O, which the aviators must translate easily as "*Result, Zero.*" They hopped about, and made derisive gestures. Torval ordered the sign removed, but uttered no word of blame. Why not let them have their fun? They would be paying dear for it all too soon.

The machines sped away, vanished.

AS the crushing heat of noon settled down, the stench grew very strong. Although vultures were seldom seen in the vicinity, they must have followed the native caravans, for they appeared in large numbers. The siesta period dragged by, a somnolent space ticked off by the pacing of sentries.

The planes reappeared at two-thirty. This time they flew lower, were more persistent. Many rifles greeted them from below. For long minutes, the bomb explosions broke out at intervals, and the sharp sputter of the big machine-guns. But they were bombarding emptiness, or scattered individuals. Undoubtedly they killed a few people, but rather by chance. This time they did not fly over the Post in farewell, but made off without fuss and throbbed away in the glare.

An official wireless message, marked "*Three-forty-two,*" asked for whatever information was available as to exact location of main body of besiegers, and

praised the "valiant garrison of Moziba." It also asked for an hourly report on the general situation of the defenders, spoke of help on the way.

Torval noted that one thing had been conceded: The message was addressed to "the Commander," without specifying names. Of course, with all Saharan posts listening in, the military authorities could not rant at long range because its instructions were ignored. But the young lieutenant knew he would have stern questioning to answer—if he lived.

It was almost four o'clock when one of the sentries called down from the wall that he was being hailed from below. The Lieutenant went to investigate, and found that the voice came from the northern side.

Upon Torval's promise not to shoot, a man appeared over the rim of the declivity, followed the wire until he reached a broken spot, and came to the foot of the wall.

He was a broad-shouldered, rather heavily built man of fifty-five or six, garbed in a blue *gandoura* caught in at the waist by strap of tressed leather from which hung a long knife in a silver scabbard. The top of his skull was bare, but a dingy white turban was twisted around his head at the temples.

"Art thou the chief?" the fellow called in Arabic.

"No other. Who art thou?"

"Thy friend. An ex-soldier. Lower a rope and haul me in." He touched his knife: "I have no other weapon. You need not fear me."

The rope was lowered, a man standing by with his rifle at the ready. When the stranger stood before Torval, the lieutenant saw a rather short fellow, not more than five feet six or seven, a rather handsome man. From his blue eyes, Torval believed him to be an Algerian Koulogli, for many of them inherit such eyes from Circassian women brought to Barbary as slaves.

"Let me not remain in sight long, Lord Lieutenant," he requested. "Even at this long distance, keen eyes might identify me. I am known to many."

TORVAL took him to the office, offered him hot tea and a cigarette. The man sat on the floor, calm, at ease, and something in his round, tanned face, fringed with graying chestnut beard, inspired confidence.

After leisurely sipping his tea, the man began to speak.

"My name is Yusuf M'safer. I come from Tafilalet. If you use the radio, you will learn that the captain in charge of the Native Intelligence Office at Béchar knows my name. I came here with Kaid Moulay, as many of my tribe did. But I know what others may not, that this is a foolish venture that cannot succeed for long. I have served the French; I am serving them still."

"What do you want?" Torval asked.

"In due time! It was hard for me to come, for the people searching for their dead grew fewer. It may be that I came too late, and that the flying-machines cannot work any more before dark. I came to say, Lord Lieutenant, that we in the Sahara have a proverb that he who holds the Saharan must hold him by the belly."

"Which means?"

"Food or drink, Lord Lieutenant. Kaid Moulay has many people here, many camels, many horses, all thirsting. Thou dost know that the water in the pond cannot be used, as it gives beasts colic and men fever. The water is brought from two wells, and must be brought often. Waiting in the heat, water goes very fast, and for so many, much must be brought. The planes should bombard those wells."

"We know that," Torval nodded. "But Yusuf, the French cannot destroy all the wells. Some are used for our allies. And who knows which wells are used, where they are located? In machines flying as far in one hour as a camel goes in ten days, can a man be sure of his goal?"

"I know the wells, can give landmarks. Show me the charts." Yusuf paused, half-smiled. "But first, a promise: Thou wilt make a writing for me, saying I gave the information, that I may be paid?"

"Promised." Torval unrolled the large-scale regional maps supplied by the Army Geographic Service. Like many natives—the Arabs claim to have invented mapping—Yusuf could read maps easily. He asked some questions about relative distances, then spoke: "This one, and this other. Even if the bombs do not strike squarely, the shafts are sunk through sand, and the explosions will fill the bottoms. It will take days of labor to clear them out again."

HE waited while Torval dictated the message to the radio-man. Then he continued:

"When the news comes to the bands that the water-holes are stopped up, they

will fear. Many of them already regret the attack, despite Kaid Moulay's bold words, and deem so many lives too much for the guns and cartridges to be taken."

The Lieutenant was interested.

"Is that what your people have been told? Nothing about a woman?"

Yusuf shrugged.

"Zaya, daughter of El Tobbal? Oh, indeed, all know about her. But that is the pretext. The real purpose is to get many guns for what is to come. The taking of towns, the loot. Some of us doubt that Zaya is here at all."

"Dost thou know her?"

"Very well indeed. I am of the Ait-bu-Khatras by my mother's blood, and among them her father has influence."

"Is she French?"

"Many claim El Tobbal was French. He came among us many years ago, from Morocco. The girl was very small. Not yet walking."

TORVAL was puzzled.

"If he were French, why wouldn't our agents know of it?"

"They might know and not speak."

Yusuf grinned. "Life is precious. And a European doesn't live among us without reason."

"He hides? He must have committed a crime."

"I have not said he was French; I have not said he hid." Yusuf gestured quietly. "As for a crime, he may have killed, which is ever a crime among you. But not always with us." He accepted another cigarette, and spoke on casual subjects.

"I must remain here now until dark, Lord Lieutenant. It was difficult to come in daylight, but after nightfall, it will be child's play for one who speaks perfect Arabic—not for such as thee. One has but to slide down the northern incline, crawl for a long while on all fours, then mingle with those who will be swarming near to take part in the shooting. There are so many people here—more than one thousand warriors, and many of those, being nomads, brought their families. So how can all know all by sight or name?"

Torval sipped at his glass of tea, strongly laced with cognac. He thought that the native had not spoken without significant intention.

"Thou couldst then take someone with thee? One who spoke Arabic as well, dressed like one of thy people?"

Yusuf laughed, showing yellow teeth.



"May I come out, Jean? It is hard in there, not knowing, with all the shooting and yelling."

"Zaya bent el Tobbal, perhaps, Lord Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"With ease—if she would trust herself to me. Near the grove, there is a place where many women are gathered, where one more would not be noticed. The Kaid's camp is far from there. We would rest until morning, then start off again, toward the French. I can leave without being suspected, as I am wounded already." Yusuf lifted the *gandoura*, showing a large, dirty bandage around his right knee. "I was on the firing-line, during the night."

"Thou wouldst consent to take her?"

"For a price—I gamble my head."

"How much?"

"Five thousand francs."

"Five thousand?" Torval nodded—for what did money matter to him now?

"Dost thou know what a note is? I shall sign a paper, which my bankers will pay if the conditions mentioned are fulfilled. If Zaya is delivered to the French at Bécharr, alive and well, five thousand francs shall be paid thee. The mark of her thumb on that paper will prevent substitution. But what guarantee have I that thou wilt not surrender her to Kaid Moulay for that same sum, paid at once into thy hands?"

"Only this, Lord Lieutenant: I should have to inform him that I came here—and when the bombs fall where they will do much harm, my head shall be struck off."

"Suppose he sent thee here?"

"Why? Kaid Moulay is not a Frenchman; he is no longer young. Would he think that thou wouldst send the girl away, when thou art thyself to die? Is it reasonable for one man to save a beautiful girl that she may find another man later?" Yusuf gestured. "Ask the girl, let her see me. If she doesn't trust me, all is finished, and I leave alone."

"Oh, she knows thee?"

"I have told thee I knew her. In the past, I was caravan-leader for her father. But tell her I am the man who brought her the French doll from Meknès."

TORVAL left the room. He found Zaya listening to the phonograph in his room. He stopped the machine.

"Do you know Yusuf el M'safer?" he asked.

"Yes, Jean."

"Who is he?"

"A strange man. He worked for my father. Then he left us, and people said he had been a French agent."

"Did he bring you a French doll from Meknès?"

"From Meknès?" Zaya stared at Torval, bewildered. Then she nodded, a hand pressed over her mouth.

"Well, he is here." He looked at Zaya searchingly: "Can he be trusted?"

"Yes. With my life, Jean."

"With your life, that's just it." He went back to the office without saying more. The wireless-operator was there, with a reply to the last message.

The man named, Béchar Headquarters confirmed, was an agent attached to the Bou-Denib Native Bureaux, at present believed to be in Tafilalet. His presence at Moziba was surprising, as he had a special mission. However, he could be trusted. Information was being checked on the maps, all necessary measures would be taken. Charanov, who had helped with the decoding, was also present. He nodded understanding, as Torval explained.

"But about the girl leaving here, Lieutenant," he said, "there's one strong objection—"

"What?"

"Suppose this man does take her to Béchar. Suppose they want to negotiate with Moulay? After all, she's the official reason for this mess, and worth nothing to the Government. There's no more proof that she is French than when she came here, you know. Her unsupported word. If she is a native, that dowry payment of Moulay's binds her as his wife."

"You're right!" Torval drummed on the table with his fingers. "And we can't get around that. She might be sacrificed to obtain a quick settlement of this row, the more readily because she would be blamed for what happened here, and it would give chaps who tried what I did a good lesson." He grumbled his discouragement: "And there's no way of proving her French. No way of making her what she isn't."

"*Wah, el zouaj,*" said Yusuf, from his place on the floor.

"He says marriage, Lieutenant," Charanov exclaimed. "He's right."

"True, true." The young officer looked at Yusuf with close attention. "With the few exceptions where it conflicts with the laws of other nations and the woman makes a demand to keep her original status, the wife takes the nationality of the husband at marriage." Torval burst into nervous laughter: "That would be something to put over on them! Here is Zaya, but she is a French lady in good standing—behold the certificate! I'd do it, in a minute,"—he shrugged—"but unfortunately, I can't play that last prank, Charanov. I need permission from my army commander, and from my parents. There are the bans, the legal delays. And nobody here to do it!"

Charanov smiled.

"I bet you it could be done. If I were French, I'd show you. But I'm a Russian, and I am married already. Twice: Left a wife in the Crimea, another in Bougie. That last one would make me a bigamist, as the marriage was in Tunisia. But if you really want to leave a widow—by Jove, they'd have to pay her a pension!—just send for Legionnaire Brichaux."

"What can he do?"

"I don't know if he ever was a lawyer, as he claims, Lieutenant. But I do know that three times he extricated himself from serious messes before court-martials, pulling some very clever stuff—"

Torval frowned in perplexity.

"But we have no civic official, no priest—"

"Try him!" Charanov was laughing. "It's worth the time, just as a joke. Tell him: 'Brichaux, I want to marry Zaya legally, officially.' I bet you one hundred francs to fifty that he finds a way."

"MOSLEM weddings are legal, Lord Lieutenant," Yusuf suddenly offered. "They have to be accepted as such, for inheritance, legitimacy and—"

"Yes, my friend, when both parties are natives. Not otherwise. Get Brichaux, will you, please?" And when Charanov had left, the officer turned to Yusuf: "You understand French well. Where did you learn it?"

"I, Lord Lieutenant?" Yusuf smiled: "I told thee I was an ex-soldier. Seven years in the *tirailleurs*. I could speak it well, too—but it has been thirty-two years since I was discharged. I have forgotten much."

BRICHAUX arrived, led by the sergeant. He was a tall, graying man in the forties, with a long, clownish face. He had been working and reported nude to the waist, revealing a torso illuminated with curious tattooings. If he had been a professional man, he did not show it outwardly.

But he listened attentively to the Lieutenant, wrinkling his brows.

"Well, it's this way, Lieutenant," he replied in a deep, booming voice: "You can't really get a legal marriage out here right away. Wait a minute! You can't get a legal marriage, no; but you can get one that will look legal, with a lot of legal-looking papers, certificates, affidavits. Court procedure will have to be gone through to prove it illegal. That takes months.

"When I was in the pioneer company, drying the big marshes at Perregaux, we had a sergeant who fell in love with a local girl. I fixed up a marriage, because her people did not want a Legionnaire in the family. Well, the thing grew so complicated in the courts that the family gave in and consented to a regular ceremony. I'll look up the case in my library, Lieutenant, and be back in twenty minutes."

"Your library, Legionnaire?"

"My pocket-codes, Lieutenant. Giving legal advice is my private racket. You'd be surprised how often I can pick up a little dough on the side."

"There's two hundred francs for you if you do it," Torval promised, taking the hint.

"You're as good as married, Lieutenant!" the Legionnaire assured him.

Very soon Brichaux was back, wearing a freshly laundered tunic, buttons gleaming. He laid a dozen small books with red covers on the office table. There were slips of paper to mark the relevant pages.

He cleared his throat, and started to speak in a loud voice, as if lecturing.

"A commander of a Military Post in what is termed 'a zone of Exterior Operations,' Lieutenant, which includes Morocco, the Near East and the Occidental Saharan Territories, where we are now located, may be called a civic official *de facto*. Article X, Second Paragraph of Item 125, Manual for Overseas Troops, makes it clear that he is a chief of police for the region protected by his Post. That is important; remember it, please.

"In the absence of a doctor, he delivers death- and birth-certificates, as you will know. That is a tacit delegation of civic power, which should create a precedent for a marriage. For in the absence of a mayor, the said Post Commander can assume that he may act as one, just as he acts as coroner and registrar. See Decree of October 23rd, 1903. Also decision of April 4th, 1910, concerning the power of Post Commanders to issue such documents."

Brichaux handed over a book and two pamphlets, with slips of paper marking places where these decisions were cited.

"Now, we all know the legal formalities surrounding a marriage according to French law, and the formalities expected of an army officer who desires to take unto himself a wife. But there is Article 169, Law of June 21st, 1907, which reads: 'The Government Attorney (*Procureur de la République*) in whose jurisdiction the marriage is to be performed, is empowered, for serious reasons, to dispense with all publication and all delays.'

"Now, Lieutenant, the Government Attorney is called in criminal matters; there is a decree placing you at the head of the investigation of a crime in your territory, so that you are acting quite legally as Government Attorney for this Post. You can evoke serious reasons why all publications, bans and delays should be forgotten: There is no time to wait, as we shall be dead tomorrow morning. I have never heard of a more serious reason."

Brichaux paused, looked up from the Code, stared at Torval.

"By the way, Lieutenant, under the circumstances, what use will those two hundred francs be to me?"

INVOLUNTARILY, the three men who heard him started to laugh, and the Legionnaire laughed himself, before long.

"So, Lieutenant, you see: Nothing to it but to make up a series of affidavits, quoting the laws, decrees, articles. I can supply the legal blanks for them, com-

plete with Government seals, at a slight increase over cost price. Always have a small stock. And you can use the Post's official stamp over your signature and the others. I think about four of them, beside the certificate proving marriage, will do the trick. They'll see there's something phony, but it will hold them for a while. A month here, two there, three elsewhere. And until Madame Torval is proved not Madame Torval, she must be treated as Madame Torval. By that time, Madame Torval will be in Oran, or even in France, to be at the proper tribunal; and if anybody tries to ship her back to the Sahara, to be turned over to an old *bicot* of a Kaid, what a fine howl there will be!"

CHARANOV and Torval consulted the passages marked. The trick would be patent and the evasion plain—but law is law.

Moreover, he could send a letter to his father, to be mailed by Yusuf in Béchar, explaining the situation, and asking for his help for Zaya. Torval Senior, who would have moved heaven and earth to prevent the marriage while his son was alive, would wish to carry out the last request of that son.

Another angle occurred to Torval.

"But, Brichaux, who can perform the ceremony? I can't well marry myself."

"Well, Charanov here, officially in command, has to make an affidavit that he had turned back command to you, so that the whole thing won't go flat because he is a Russian, a foreigner, and the law foresees a Frenchman in command. But you can make another affidavit, as soon as you have signed the necessary papers, turning command back to him. Then he can act as civic official. And Article 170 states clearly—look at it—that a marriage contracted by a Frenchman anywhere according to the ritual accepted where he is, is valid. To make sure, you better have a religious ceremony also. There's a Hungarian, Vergak, who can do it. He was ordained. And he must be in good standing, for the chaplain, who must know all about his past, lets him officiate sometimes."

Torval smiled skeptically. Participants, official, witnesses and even priest, his marriage could never be called commonplace. The bride-to-be was not even informed!

He sent for her. There was a short wait; and Brichaux, seated at the table, set to work. He wrote with amazing

speed, ruled lines with the ebony rule, reached out for this seal and that rubber stamp with all the importance and activity of an amateur performing on the musical glasses.

"GREETINGS and peace on thee, daughter of el Tobbal."

"Greetings and salvation on thee, Yusuf the Traveler."

Zaya and the native looked at each other for a second; then started the long list of questions customary among polite people, concerning relatives and friends. Brichaux pushed out sheets of paper, with brisk advice: "This one's signed by the Lieutenant, this one by him and Charanov, Sergeant. I'm signing as one witness; Vergak will sign as the other. Young lady, this is an affidavit for you to sign—free consent, religion—"

"What is this about, Jean?" the girl asked.

"Yusuf will take you away tonight, if you will trust him. It would be foolish for one not needed here to remain to die. Now, so you will be fully protected, I shall marry you."

"Marry me, Jean?"

"It isn't a real marriage, you know—" He grew red; he knew it and he was angered by the knowledge. "A convenience, you know. Nobody will take it seriously."

She showed all her teeth in a smile. "A marriage for fooling?" she asked.

"Exactly," Torval agreed, smiling in turn at her childish phrase: "A marriage for fooling. You don't need to go through a Moslem ceremony, so it won't—"

"I was baptized by a holy man."

"A missionary of the White Fathers," Yusuf said, speaking unexpectedly. "I remember him because he said he was my namesake: Father Joseph."

"I know him," the Lieutenant declared.

This he would mention to his father in the farewell letter. Perhaps the missionary would know something concerning Zaya's people, her birth, her real identity. He might be difficult to locate, however, for although grown very old, he was wandering the remotest reaches of the desert, with a native convert for a guide, and his portable chapel stowed on a pack-camel.

LEGIONNAIRE VERGAK reported. He was a very large, stern man with a short dark beard.

Torval knew him to be an obedient, quiet soldier, as brave as most. He had

suffered in last night's combat, for adhesive tape covered a gash across his nose, another on his chin; and his big fingers were burnt from handling a hot rifle. But he was not a subordinate now, and he reminded them all that marriage was a sacrament, and that he would not participate in anything that mocked it.

When he was reminded of the situation, of the danger surrounding them, of approaching death, he shrugged: "The soul is more important than the body." Torval assured him that there was no derision intended. "I will take your word for it, Lieutenant. And I must have a talk with the young lady, to instruct her in the obligations of a Christian marriage."

TORVAL accepted his conditions. The religious ceremony, properly recorded, would offer another difficulty to the authorities.

While Vergak talked to Zaya, Torval, Charanov and Yusuf bent over the maps, and the native indicated the path he intended to follow. He owned three camels, so mounts were not a problem. In three days, four at the most, he declared, he would locate one of the French detachments. But he engaged himself to take Zaya into Colomb-Béchar in person.

"We shall leave at ten o'clock," he informed Torval, "going down the north side. There will be a moon, but that spot is in deep shadow. And they are not watching to keep anyone from escaping. They know you have no camels here."

At six o'clock, Torval went out to attend roll-call, probably the last for all of them. The sky was luminous, with the tawny glow of the brief twilight. The men were silent, and only the sharp "Present!" was heard. They presented arms as the bugler played "Colors." The officer knew that Brichaux had informed them of developments, and spoke a few words before dismissing them.

"The marriage will take place at eighty-three tonight. The lady will leave soon after. I authorized the cooks to take from my personal stores whatever they wish to make a good dinner for all. Each man will be allowed a bottle of corked wine. There will be liqueurs, cigars, and champagne. I have already signed the voucher to take the last from the medical supplies. I don't believe our using it now will deprive any fever case in the future. The air here is so healthy of late that we no longer need fear fever."

They laughed for a while at this.

"I need not advise you to keep from getting too drunk. The quantities granted will not bother a Legionnaire for long. By the time our friends call again, between two and three in the morning, you will be able to receive them. Like Legionnaires!"

And, like Legionnaires, they prepared for the occasion. The tables and benches were brought into the courtyard; stable-lanterns were screened with red or green paper, to give the effect of Venetian lamps, and suspended from wires stretched from building to building. Torval's stock of canned chicken and duck was taken to the kitchen, with tins of fine peas. Each man had placed his tin mess-kit and cup on the board, and at each place a bottle of wine was standing. The baker had an enormous jelly tart in the oven.

But there was little gayety until the corks were drawn. All had had the same thought: "*The condemned men ate heartily!*" As the fine old Bordeaux poured down their throats, however, the Legionnaires cheered up. Several of them rose from their benches, lifted their cup toward the small table where Torval, Charanov and Zaya were seated. They offered toasts, in any language that came easiest to them.

But one man remained on the platform, and he was changed every thirty minutes. No sound came from the outside, except the distant cries of animals. Torval wondered if the natives had noticed the unusual profusion of light.

YUSUF had refused the common fare, dined off hardtack and a tin of bully beef. He was restless, walked about constantly, climbed the stairs, paced the walls, returned to the yard. Zaya had drunk a few swallows of wine, and not being accustomed to it, chattered like a magpie. But as she shifted from French to Arabic, and from that to Berber dialect, she did not reveal very much.

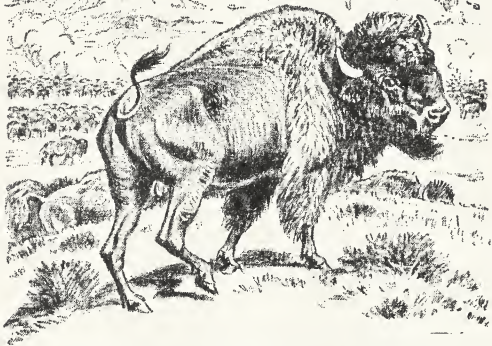
The six quarts of champagne allotted the men had been lowered into the deep well to chill. Just as it was being hauled up, the sentry called out.

"*Alerte!*"

There was a ludicrous rush to the stacks of rifles; everyone lumbered to the wall. In the moonlight, a long line of silhouettes could be seen, creeping forward slowly.

The climax of this authentic novel of the Foreign Legion will appear in our forthcoming May issue.

The War Lord



A vivid story of the frontier, by the author of "The Last of the Thundering Herd"

By BIGELOW NEAL

MI-TEE came north with the buffalo herd, a unit in a rumbling carpet of brown that stretched from horizon to horizon, a roaring, bellowing host surging on and on at the magic call of Saskatchewan.

There was a time when she moved only with the vanguard, but that was a time long past. Mire-holes, blizzards, the strain of crossing and recrossing the Missouri River, all had exacted their toll. Now she plodded slowly in the rear among the old, the sick and the weak, behind her the dreaded buffalo wolves waiting for the time when she or another might falter on the trail. And with her she carried the promise of a new life. Even now the instinct of self-preservation was dominated by the all-compelling urge for the protection of her young.

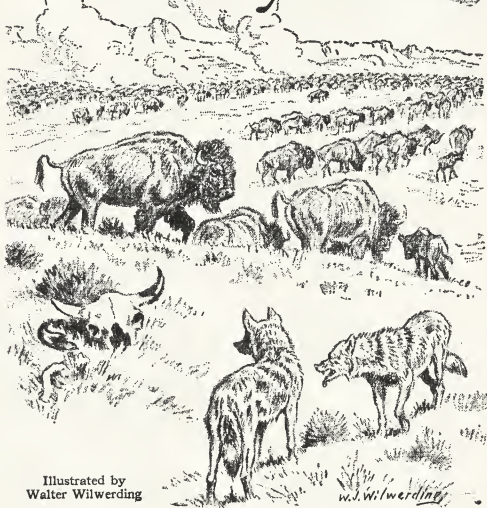
Her course skirted the edge of a sunken land, the Bad Lands of Dakota, and

she paused on the crest of a ridge, her ponderous head swinging slowly from side to side, as her gaze swept the prairie before her.

Evidently she saw nothing to her liking. Neither tree nor rock offered even partial protection were she to fall behind the herd. And so she went on again, moving slowly and erratically as if in pain; and truly it was time for her to go, for threatening gray forms were gathering silently about her.

To continue with the herd was impossible. To stop meant certain death. It was a dilemma to challenge a far stronger mentality than hers. And then a scent came to her nostrils, a pungent something borne on the evening breeze. It brought a hazy memory of the past, a clouded recollection of a great square butte, a line of glowing fires and a curtain of gas and smoke. Unquestionably there was a time when the butte had proved a haven to her and others of her

of Smoky Butte



Illustrated by
Walter Wilwerding

kind; for now, with the pungent odor on the air, she obeyed the call, half instinct, half memory, and swung her head up into the breeze.

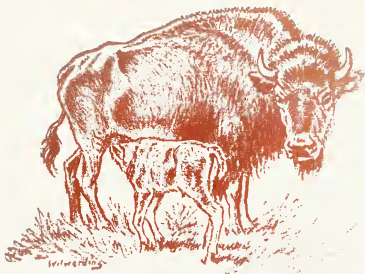
But now a new recollection came from the dim past. In the Bad Lands there were mountain lions yet more deadly than the wolves. Again she hesitated, but the wolves were closing in, and no choice remained.

Abruptly changing her course, she followed a swale that narrowed and dipped into the land of chaos. The swale became a deep draw, a timber-choked coulee, a white river of plum and thorn-apple blossoms winding down into the forbidding land. Far below the level of

the prairie she found a glade at the foot of a bluff surrounded by thorny thickets. Here enemies could not encircle her, and there was still a world of power in that tremendous neck; and her horns, though dulled by the years, were terrible weapons even now. Here she lay down to rest; and here Te was born.

Te was a liability at first. He came into the world with large ears plastered against his neck. His big brown eyes looked much and saw little or nothing. Probably his brain couldn't generate a worth-while idea in a month. He was guided only by instinct.

With little sense of dignity, he lay flat on his side while his mother raked him



from stem to stern with her broad rough tongue. In this process one side of him acquired a permanent wave and one ear stuck straight up. If anything, he appeared more foolish than ever.

Mi-tee became impatient at his lack of appreciation. A thrust of her nose rolled him over, and she went to work on the other side. The change in position was premature, for Te had made no arrangements concerning his feet. They should have been tucked under him, but they were straight and rigid in the grass. But his brain cleared rapidly, and he began to take a mild interest in his environment.

His first attempts at intelligent observation were partially frustrated by the disloyalty of his neck. No matter how hard he tried to concentrate, it allowed his head to wobble. In this manner, while sniffing at a sprig of prairie sage soft as down, he found himself rooting his nose in a cactus plant. It greatly modified his inquisitiveness.

Another impulse came from his battery of instinct. It led his nose up the shin-bone of his mother until he encountered a long curtain of hair hanging from her knee. Selecting a large mouthful, he evidently imagined he would find it nourishing. Instead it was charged with cockleburrs and last year's beggar-lice. Again disappointment led to a change of tactics.

He decided to enlarge his field of activity. His new program called for co-operation on the part of his feet, and he tried to get them under him. The front pair did fairly well, and he found he could sit up, but an effort to bring the

others into position landed him on his nose, and he lapsed into another long period of thought.

But nature insisted on taking her course. In the end instinct conquered, and he stood like a sawhorse braced on all fours. From then, it was but a matter of minutes until he learned such difficult feats as turning himself end for end and backing up. For some reason he learned the more logical forward movement last of all. Perhaps it was due to the gentle caresses of his mother's tongue. Because she licked his hair against the grain, he must either brace himself from going forward or stand on his head.

Every effort, though a failure in itself, proved a step in advance, for the blood flowed more smoothly through his limbs, new strength came, and his brain gained rapidly in the contest for control of his muscles. Accordingly his attitude changed from passive resistance to aggression, and he began a systematic exploration of his mother, but he circumnavigated her huge form several times before he located his objective.

WITH success, he showed a high degree of satisfaction. He stood with his feet braced wide apart. Thin streamers of foam swayed and dripped from his mouth, and his tail wiggled up and up until it tossed above him like a brown banner waving high in the hour of triumph.

For a time he pushed and pulled, smacked loudly and bunted. The last was wholly unnecessary but instinctive. Then gradually his enthusiasm waned.

Little by little his tail came to the horizontal, then down toward his heels. The supply of nourishment behind his ribs increased visibly. He was filled to capacity and did not know enough to stop. But here again nature intervened. His pushes and pulls became half-hearted, his bunts no more than simulated; and finally he saved himself from going to sleep on his feet by lying down with a grunt and a sigh of satisfaction. He became merely a bundle, a golden gleam under the buck-brush and the sage while above him the guarding mother slept on her feet, her head so low that her breath stirred ripples in the hair of her sleeping son.

For some hours the calf did not move. The chill of a spring morning gave way to the warmth of midday, and he lay motionless except for the rise and fall of his ribs. His mother had grazed from sight, and so silent was the glade that a magpie fluttered to a branch above the sleeping youngster and a cottontail hopped from the shelter of the thorn-apples to bask in the warming rays. Then a tawny form moved slightly in the underbrush.

THE cottontail dodged and pattered away under the trees. The magpie uttered a warning scream and volleyed upward to safety. Te opened his eyes at the scream of the bird and lifted his head. He was nose to nose and eye to eye with a mountain lion.

Te was interested. His brown eyes opened wider, and his pink nose stretched out toward the curved teeth of the cat. But his nose brought a message over the wires of heredity, and his friendly curiosity gave way to fear. Flattening his ears, the calf dropped his head to the ground. The movement saved his life.

The lion leaped and struck for the curly brown neck. But the throat had moved, and the deadly jaws snapped together in the loose skin over the calf's shoulder. Not seriously hurt but mindful of the pain, Te let out a vehement call for his mother.

There was no second strike at the unprotected throat. Before the cat could recover her balance, the ground trembled under the impact of thundering hoofs. The trees behind them swayed and bowed to the passage of Mi-tee's rushing body. The cat snarled, recoiled and braced herself. A lance-tipped paw raised to strike, but a second glance at the shaggy mother, at the onrushing

mountain of infuriated flesh and those blue-black horns was enough for the lion. With a final spitting cry, she leaped for the shelter of the brush.

With only herself to consider, the mother would have fled from the tawny menace lurking among the shadows. None knew better than she that her charge at the lion was largely a gesture. It called for all of her strength and left none with which to continue the combat. But Te was too young to travel either rapidly or far. There was no choice. For the present she must remain even at the risk of another attack.

For a time peace reigned in the glade. Under the worried but watchful eyes of his mother Te gave his attention mainly to the business of eating and sleeping. He got up for his meals, and ate until he could stand no longer. Then he lay down and slept until the processes of digestion made it possible to repeat the performance.

But in a day or so the calf evinced increasing interest in his surroundings and began a series of short-range explorations which kept him on his feet for longer periods each day. And with new strength came a spirit of playfulness which resulted in high-tailed scamperings and charges directed at such enemies as bunches of sand-grass and clumps of stunted sage.

On one occasion he became the victim of a self-generated idea. It occurred to him that he was a war-lord in his own right. Selecting his mother as the object of a devastating assault, he aimed at her knee and charged. His course, however, was laid before he dropped his head, and his advance was a trifle erratic. He not only missed the knee but he missed ev-



everything, and went under the great friendly bulk without so much as disturbing a hair.

Humiliation begot anger. When he finally checked his rush, he turned to find his mother, her head swung in his direction, grazing without a sign of interest or admiration. Again he lowered his curly head, and taking aim at an imaginary line drawn between his mother's eyes, he launched himself on a reckless errand of vengeance.

This time his aim was good and his bolt went true to the mark. But the mother never stopped clipping the buffalo grass; nor did she close an eye to acknowledge his arrival. Te was more impressed. His head, designed to withstand at maturity the impact of tons, was yet too soft. For a time his ideas, warlike or otherwise, were badly scattered.

AND then one evening when the shadows of the peaks were merging into dusk, a covey of prairie chickens hurtled skyward from the thornapple thicket. Mi-tee swung her head to see two points of orange light glowing dully from the underbrush. The lion had returned.

At that the mother lowered her nose to the head of her sleeping son. A deep rumbling sound came from her chest. Te understood, for he scrambled hastily to his feet, to huddle trembling against the giant ribs. He too saw the glittering yellow lights, and he wrinkled his nose to catch the dreaded catlike scent. And out of the warning from his mother and the scent hated by all of his kind, he generated a hatred destined to smolder and glow in his wild heart until the time to come when it would burst into an all-consuming flame. But now there was nothing he could do. His mother was moving, and his bravery was not equal to his hatred. Accordingly, flattening one ear against her shoulder and leaning awkwardly against her side, he plodded along a trail which led down into the heart of the Bad Lands.

At the mouth of the coulee where the white-crested plum thicket gave way to barren alkali they were on the floor of a narrow clay-walled cañon, its sides a cross section of the ages, its course strewn with the débris of centuries. Through leaping shadows cast by the northern lights, Te had his first glimpse of a weird land. The transition from the comparatively modern setting of his birth to this graveyard of antiquity was sudden and complete. Even the snap-

ping and crackling of rosebushes and the rattle of stones under his awkward hoofs gave way to the silence of lifeless clay and the soundless passage of his feet over a carpet of alkali.

Knowing more, the little fellow would have been afraid. Knowing less, he might have taken no interest. As it was, however, he plodded along with his eyes big in wonder and his tail, subdued by awe, dangling limply.

Once the mother halted and looked back, but she sounded a worried note of command and hurried on when some shadowy thing moved far back along the trail and the increasing brilliance of the northern lights brought orange glints from the eyes of Immu Tanka.

Te also saw the eyes, and a wave of anger put a belligerent arch in his backbone; but his memory was short, and when he fell over the stump of a petrified tree, his attention returned to the strange phenomena before him.

Mi-tee's course took them through aisles where slender clay pillars supported slabs of rock like giant mushrooms. They passed forests of petrified trees, and Te was startled when the ground trembled under his feet as they passed sinkholes, those deadly areas where seemingly bottomless pits were filled with writhing mud.

Again the mother stopped to gaze back into the night, and again came that rumbling command, for the yellow eyes were still there, closer than before. Te obeyed with a renewed wave of anger, but once more wonder came uppermost as a jackrabbit broke cover at his feet, and a mother skunk, followed by the rippling blanket of black and white which was her family, crossed before them. When they reached a turn in the cañon, a wall of gas and smoke stretched from hill to hill, and Te planted his feet firmly, refusing to budge as he saw the dull glow of fires, as he heard the hiss of steam and the odor of burning sulphur stung his lungs.

THIS, then, was the place her faulty memory associated with safety. It was nothing more than a flat-topped butte, three sides rendered unscalable by ledges of sandstone, and the fourth lined by the ash-pits and smoke of a burning lignite vein.

Apparently their way was blocked, but the mother did not hesitate. At some time in the past she had lost all fear of the burning butte. And now with



peaks to the east, and a yellow light flooded the scene at their feet. Across from them a file of elk followed some invisible trail on the cañon wall; a gray owl labored across the sky, sending a host of shadowy cottontails pattering for shelter; and a coyote, sitting bolt upright on a scoria-tipped peak, pointed his nose at the moon and broke into yelps and eerie cries. And now, down through a temporary rent in the curtain of gas, mother and son saw a tawny shape moving on the alkali. It was Immu Tanka, the mountain lion, beginning an intermittent vigil which was to endure until the day of reckoning finally came. At sight of her, Mi-tee resumed her climb, while Te, too weary to keep abreast, followed with his nose bumping between her heels.

The last of the climb, though steep, was short. Abruptly the land leveled off, and Te again shook off a portion of his weariness to gaze on a narrow plain as level as a table. A thick carpet of buffalo grass covered the ground, and a

a last glance at the cat still close upon their trail, she rumbled a sharp order to the calf and began the ascent of a trail which led upward between the fires.

It was a perilous moment. Nothing but a dim memory told her the path was safe. In one place the trail was all but eaten away, and the clay under her feet crumbled and slid into a pit of fire. But she passed over safely, and Te held sturdily to his place under her side until they were well above the fires and climbing the face of the burning butte.

Halfway to the summit, in the lap of an old landslide, a spring trickled from the butte. Here Mi-tee left the path and paused to drink, while Te sniffed at the water, and shivered in sudden fright when a frog leaped from under his nose. Returning to the path, they resumed the ascent, Mi-tee slowly and with many pauses, and Te now staggering with weariness and a bit groggy from want of sleep.

With their last halt short of the crest, Mi-tee turned for a final survey of the cañon below. Te looked also, and the sleepiness fled from his eyes, for the great disk of the moon swung clear of the



With a final spitting cry, the cat leaped for the shelter of the brush.

breeze swept across the Bad Lands, causing moonlit ripples where the grass swayed under its breath. Before them stood a huge boulder, and in its shelter Mi-tee stopped. Te was hungry and made a brave attempt at eating his supper, but his eyelids were too heavy and the aches in his muscles too numerous. When Mi-tee knelt and lowered her great body to the ground, he was glad to curl himself in a ball against her neck. . . .

When Te awoke, his mother was feeding on the plain. It was very comfortable in the lee of the boulder, and the sighing of the wind around the rock and across the buffalo grass prolonged his drowsiness. But when a prairie chicken whizzed like a bullet across his back, he sprang to his feet and made for his mother.

Breakfast over, they went back down the path to the spring. While Mi-tee drank, Te sampled some choke-cherry leaves and found them unsatisfactory. Turning his attention to the dried fruit of a rose-bush, he learned that nature intended them for deer and buffalo calves. He was eating them with considerable relish when the activities of his mother caught and held his attention.

Mi-tee had found a puddle of mud. In the middle of it she lay down flat and drove one horn into the oozy ground. Then by a series of kicks and powerful bodily contortions, she worked her way around the horn until one side of her was thoroughly coated with blue mud. Then turning over, she kept on until her entire body, even her face, was coated with slime. Afterward she got to her feet and returned up the path, all but a total stranger to her son.

Later in the day, when sun and wind had dried and caked her coating of ooze, she went to the boulder and rubbed off most of the mud. With it came great tufts of her winter coat. Te seemed much pleased with the result, for when the mud was rubbed off, he found his mother was still there!

THUS began their life on the burning butte. And it was an ideal life for Te. Protected from the lion by the barrier of burning lignite, with both grass and water far beyond their needs, and with the trees and brush by the spring affording ample protection from storm and blizzard, life for both mother and son became simple indeed.

In such an environment and under those conditions Te grew amazingly.

Nor was the more soldierly side of his training neglected, for though he had none other of his size with which to practice the art of battle, often he would see Immu Tanka lurking beyond the line of fire, or catch her scent drifting on the air. Then he would become angry, and battle with trees and rocks, and often with his mother.

Month followed month, and seasons slid by in rapid succession. Te grew stronger as his mother aged and weakened; and where under ordinary circumstances, he would have left her at the end of his first year, and she would have forgotten him quite as soon, here, prisoners as they were, a comradeship developed which would endure as long as both were alive.

AND so it happened that Te was three years old before a change came in the normal course of their imprisonment. It began one day in the spring. Mi-tee lay sleeping near the boulder; and Te was troubled because she had not eaten nor gone to the spring that day or the day before. He was coaxing her now, rumbling plaintively and licking her neck to attract her attention. But she lay quietly, apparently asleep.

And then the silence of the Bad Lands was broken by a dull roar, and the earth trembled. Probably the fire eating under the face of the butte had tapped some underground reservoir of water, and the pressure of steam thus generated had risen until nothing could withstand it. Anyway, as Te raised his head, startled by the roar and the trembling earth, he saw a wide strip of the butte slipping down into the cañon. It moved slowly at first, but with increasing speed; and now columns of smoke shot high into the air, and the strip of sinking plain broke up into hurtling sections. Then everything was blotted out by dust.

It lasted but a moment. Then the roar died away and the trembling stopped. When the breeze had carried away the dust, the steep face of the butte was a gentle slope of boulders, broken clay and twisted trees. Under it the fires of Smoky Butte were smothered and buried forever. Now the way to freedom was open—and now the opportunity for which the mountain lion had waited so long had come.

By evening Te forgot his fright and went in search of the vanished spring. Mi-tee still lay by the rock. Suddenly a leopard squirrel squeaked in fright and



He carried the battle to close quarters, driving the great cat in a circle about the form of his dying mother.

darted into his burrow. The shrilling of crickets ceased, and even the sawing of grasshoppers died away. Then something moved behind the mother, but she did not see. The dead grass rustled as a threatening tawny form glided forward, but Mi-tee did not hear. Immu Tanka had come again.

Inch by inch the yellow cat came on. It seemed that this time nothing could rob her of her victim. But something, perhaps a sound, perhaps a scent, warned the aged buffalo of peril. Mi-tee opened her eyes and saw again the yellow eyes and the cruelly curved teeth of the lion.

Too weak to lift her head, Mi-tee used the last of her strength and called to her son for aid exactly as he had called to her so many times in the past.

HER cry of distress was music to the ears of Immu Tanka. Instead of leaping upon her defenseless prey, she paused, her tail whipping from side to side, and she yawned with catlike pleasure in the suffering of her intended victim. But suddenly she recoiled with a spitting hiss of hatred. She had postponed her assault a moment too long, for there on the crest of the butte, in the full glow of the sunset, stood Te.

It was indeed a far cry from the wab- bly, trembling calf to the giant warrior that faced her now. As he came slowly on, his eyes rolling in anger, she was face to face with God's greatest living handiwork on the prairies. He was far taller and longer and broader than his mother. On his sides and flanks his satiny brown skin rippled and rolled as giant muscles swelled beneath. His shoulders and neck were hidden in a black tumult of mane. Long fringes glittered at his knees; through the curly hair on his face great brown eyes were blood-shot with anger. And through the heavy growth on the crest of his head his horns, blue-black, cold and sharp as needles, sparkled in the last of the sunlight.

A few rods from the lioness Te halted. One forefoot raked the ground, and a spurt of dust rose above him. A roar burst from his mighty throat. A blast of air from his lungs flattened the grass at his feet. Dropping his head, he launched more than a ton and a quarter of flesh and bone at the lion.

Under his charge the earth trembled. Behind him a ribbon of dust floated toward the sky. As he reached the place where the cat had been, his horns came up with a ripping stroke that would have

cut her to shreds. But Immu Tanka was not there. Quicker than the lightning above the Bad Lands, she had leaped to one side.

The lion has two methods of battle. In one she leaps from above to sever the spinal cord. In the other she turns on her back and uses the ripping power of her claws. Now even as she dodged, she leaped for the back of the buffalo.

But she miscalculated on the youth and agility of her opponent. Te wheeled so suddenly that she missed the fatal stroke and tumbled from his back to the ground. And she had no other opportunity, for Te did not back away for a second charge. Instead he carried the battle to close quarters, facing unflinchingly the raking power of her claws and driving the great cat in a circle about the form of his dying mother.

A SWIRLING cloud of dust gathered about the warriors. Overhead an eagle screamed defiance to the combatants; around them jackrabbits forgot the eagle and hopped about in excitement. Then Immu Tanka tried another leap for the back of the buffalo—and the fight was over, for he caught her in mid-air and his deadly horns struck home. She went into the air end over end; and when she struck the ground, she lay as she fell, lifeless and motionless except for the rippling of her yellow coat as a breeze swept across the butte.

For a time Te stood above the form of his vanquished enemy, roaring defiance. Then he approached his mother, and a deep rumble of friendship formed in his chest. But there was no answer.

Now from far away the evening breeze brought the sound of the migrating herd. Te raised his head and listened. Another roar burst from his lungs, and he turned toward the sound. But on the brink of the butte he paused, for his mother had not followed.

He called to her. He returned and stood above her, rumbling coaxingly. Dropping his great head, he licked her neck, but there was no response. Tomorrow perhaps, when he realized that their companionship was ended forever, he would answer the call of the herd. But as yet he was unconvinced. As night closed in, still rumbling that plaintive call, he stood—a mountain of flesh and bone and muscle—looming above the motionless form.

Another story by Bigelow Neal will appear in an early issue.



WHATEVER the reason, the people of the theater have from the earliest times been involved in actual off-stage events even more dramatic than the scenes of their mimic world. This story "Shyster Hero" goes back to the first recorded theater, the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece—and is the first of a remarkable series.

Pen drawings by Clinton Shepherd and John Richard Flanagan, after the paintings by Peder Cavanagh

INSANITY, in its milder forms, speaks either an addled pate or a sublime genius. In the case of my friend Peder Cavanagh, the decision is difficult to reach. Being an artist, he relies on the artistic temperament, which is a peculiar quality.

That he has a hypnotic effect upon people, even upon the editors who buy his sketches, is undeniable. When Cavanagh really turns on his big, bluff, blue-eyed Norse-Irish personality, he is irresistible; if this happens in his own studio, surrounded by ship-models and sea paintings and sketches, he is supreme. He could persuade anyone of anything. The devil of it is, that he is usually right.

When I walked in and saw him finishing the sketch of a nude, I was astonished. "Hello!" I said. "This is something new for you. Where's your model?"

"Dead." He switched the easel around toward the light, and left it. "Take another look, while I wash up."



"Citizens, judges, I demand that you sentence this woman to death, if—"

The World Was Their Stage

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

I studied the sketch, fascinated; it had the damnable charm of Cavanagh himself—an indefinable, appealing quality.

"I'm going in for theatrical stuff," he said, coming back and standing beside me, as he wiped his hands. He was pleased by my expression of interest. "This, for example," he amplified, "takes one back to the very origins of the theater in dim antiquity."

"Garden of Eden?" I asked.

"No levity; I'm serious. One of the immortal stories of art and history, Harry, that has so modern an angle it might have happened yesterday. In fact, it happens every day. Blood and romance, tears and the shadow of death, beauty and—"

"Omit the flowers, my dear fellow," I broke in upon his rhapsody. "You've got

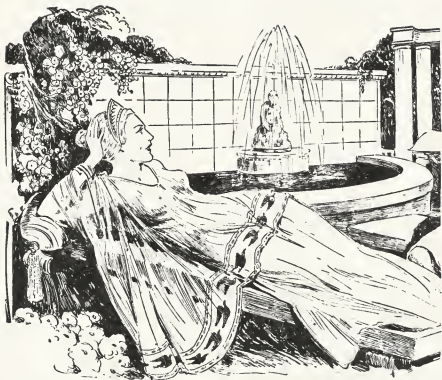
something in this sketch; no sales-talk is necessary."

"Not for sale, dammit," he retorted. "This is beyond price—"

"Did you say the model is dead?" I interrupted again.

"Yes. I've been trying to recapture something: a dream of classical beauty, Athens in its ancient pristine loveliness. The air-effects; that's no joke, you know. They say that the air of ancient Athens was responsible for its beauty and mental vigor—some vague electric quality in the air. Today, we'd call it violet rays, and send sinus-sufferers there. Here's a finished sketch, to go with that nude. A bit of water-color work."

He began to fumble among his sketches stacked on the floor, and got one out.



"Never mind it," I said. "You know very well I don't like water-colors."

"This is different, though. Ever hear of Eleusis?"

"Of course. A town fourteen miles from Athens. The famous Mysteries of Demeter were celebrated there—the Eleusinian Mysteries. But see here, Peder—I thought you said this had some connection with the theater?"

"So it has." He hoisted his picture to the easel; then, in front of it, he suddenly clapped another sketch—this time showing the same figure and face, but clothed in a flowing robe.

"Look at this, now," he said. "Same girl. You need the color in this gown, or *peplos*, as it was called. The ancient mysteries, like that of Eleusis, were the oldest of all theatrical performances, and of course strictly limited to men as actors and audience."

"Never mind about that," I said, looking at the sketch. "By thunder, Peder, you really have something here! Don't tell me you didn't use a model. There's an exquisite grace in this figure, in the features—"

He silenced me with his outburst of fluency. He was off full speed.

"Listen! I want you to get this right: You've got to see the girl's background in a literal sense. She wasn't precisely what we'd call a model of propriety today; but in Athens, remember, customs and morals were very different from our standards.

Now,"—and he jerked away his sketches,—"here's the water-color."

"Ah!" An exclamation broke from me. I leaned forward, entranced by the color and balance and glowing beauty of the scene.

"This was her house," said Peder Cavanaugh, and pointed. "Look! Here's the glitter of blue sea in the distance; the silver-green olive groves, the white buildings of the city, all a frame for the subject. And in the foreground, against a house-wall lifting to the right, her terraced garden—"

HIS voice rambled on, but I forgot it. He had somehow captured that light and intoxicating air of Athens, unique in its balmy quality. It carried the scent of a thousand blossoms, for spring was everywhere. Flowers hedged the garden paths, and fruits were in full bloom.

Against the house-wall was a fountain surrounded by cushioned marble seats. An awning of bright-hued Anatolian weave was stretched to keep off the sun. On every side were exquisite bits of art—marble statuettes, figurines of wood and ivory and gold. The wall was faced with magnificent Persian tiles, plundered from some Eastern temple or palace, showing very curious details of Oriental worship. Against this blaze of color sat a young man, reading aloud the immortal lines of an *Iliad* written on bleached parchment from Pergamos.



"It would mean certain death!" he said.

The voice of his auditor broke in upon his reading.

"Ah, Skopas! You read well, but not well enough. As in everything else, you're admirable but not supreme."

He broke off, frowning, to bend half-angry eyes on the woman to whom this house and garden belonged. He was handsome, well-built, and in his eyes burned the fire of desire and a desolate longing.

"Phryne! Will you never yield, will you never love me?" he burst forth. "I'm ready to pour riches at your feet; with them my faith and loyalty and service—my whole self! To win your love, I'd gladly die tomorrow. Yet you always say the same thing. What can I do to show myself supreme, as you demand?"

"Prove that you're not ordinary, my dear Skopas. For example, look at me! I'm supreme, the most beautiful woman in Athens. Perdiccas the sculptor has said so, and he knows. Why should I bother with ordinary men?"

Her voice blended with the humming of the bees and stole like music upon the fragrant air; its soft, husky vibrance was indescribable. So was she herself, as she reclined upon the cushions. No woman, but girl, aflame with mischievous, dancing vitality. She wore a long, gossamer-thin peplos of blue, upon which disported tiny silver doves, the bird of Venus.

"True," Skopas said thoughtfully. He gazed at her lovely hair of raw gold, her eyes like sapphire, her face that in repose

was the face of a goddess, and in animation was like a flashing, sun-glimmering ocean wave.

"Yes, that's true," he went on. "You're not like other girls, Phryne. You have extraordinary fancies, impulses, curiosities. You do daring things. You predicted that the frieze of the Parthenon would come to life; and then you danced, veiled, on the steps so that people thought the miracle had happened. You refuse to show your face abroad, except here in the garden or when you serve in the temple of Venus. You are unpredictable, and beyond understanding!"

"And supreme!" She laughed softly, luxuriously, as she stretched herself. "Suppose I became an actress and went upon the stage?"

"You'd be glorious!" he cried quickly. "You'd be the most wonderful Antigone, the most charming Cassandra, ever seen!"

SHE grimaced slightly. "Nonsense, Skopas. I don't mean to worship the Muses in the theater itself. I mean the older stage, from which our theater came. I mean the stage which existed back and back into the dim past before there was any history; the ancient and primeval stage, which constituted a worship of the olden gods, with masks and characters and ritual."

He started slightly. "Not the Mysteries, Phryne? You know that no woman can take part in the Mysteries. It is forbidden. No one has ever spoken of those secret things; no writer or poet, no sculptor or artist, has ever alluded to what passes behind the dread seal of the Mysteries!"

She regarded him, half-smiling. "True. I forgot that, Skopas. By the way, the Mysteries at Eleusis are to be celebrated next week—the spring festival. Aren't you one of the officials?"

"Yes," he said, not without pride. "I have charge of the characters in the chief parts; I cast them, costume them, coach them. There's a rehearsal at Eleusis tomorrow."

"Well, here's luck to you!" She lifted a silver goblet and sipped the cool wine, and seemed to change the subject altogether. "Do you know, Skopas, I rather like you! If you'd do one thing for me—just one thing—I'll give you anything you ask."

He stiffened. For a moment he stared at her, his eyes eager and impetuous.

"Name it!" he said curtly, color rising in his face. "By the gods, I'll do it!"



Phryne, returning to her party, amazed them all by the triumphant exultation of her dancing, while the Cretan sage clashed at the cymbals.

"Agreed, then," she said. "An oath, remember, by all the gods! I understand that in the Mysteries next week, in the worship of Demeter the earth-mother, the characters of Proserpine and other women are played by men. Well, assign one of those parts to me. That's all."

Terror seized him. His eyes dilated, the color ebbed from his face. All in a moment, he became quiet as cold cinders.

"That's impossible," he said in a low voice. "I have sworn an oath, by Demeter herself!"

"You just now swore by *all* the gods," said she, smiling. "In either case, you must become a breaker of oaths, a man forsworn! Therefore, choose the better way; break an oath, and win me, have my love! For it shall be yours—I swear it!"

Sweat started on his forehead.

"Your accursed curiosity!" he broke out. "You want to do what no woman

has ever done. I might have guessed it. Why, you'll be torn in pieces! The Athenians will never endure to have a woman profane the Mysteries! It would mean certain death."

"Not at all," she said coolly. "You forget that I'm in the service of Venus, my friend." And she touched the blue robe significantly. "A servant of the gods cannot be adjudged to death."

"But you'd be banished or sold into slavery, at the best," he said hoarsely.

"Silly!" Her eyes warmed upon him. "Who would know?"

"The gods would know," he muttered. Swift anger shook her. "Get out of here!" she cried, with a flash of fury. "I'm sick of such talk. Be a god, instead of a man, for once! In that case, come back at twilight, and if your lips burn for mine, I'll give you a trifle of advance payment. Otherwise, stay away forever!

Now leave, before I forget my oath and change my mind altogether, you craven! I offer you what other men would be glad to have, and you prate of the gods! Go! And don't take that Iliad with you, either. It belonged to the great Euripides, and I value it as an association copy."

Skopas departed, in mingled anger and dismay; which, as she well knew, would presently kindle into desperate desire.

FIVE years before, she had come out of Bœotia, an awkward little farm girl, to peddle cloves in the city. Now her awkward country name was gone, and all her past was gone with it; as Phryne, fairest of the fair, she had won to the very summit of fame. Wealth had been showered upon her; all Athens raved of her beauty; and her name was extolled throughout Greece and the isles. Sculptors and artists vied for her services as a model, and the great painter Apelles had immortalized her features.

A little love, a little kiss—there was far more to it than that, and her profession was a proud one in Athens. Intellectual companionship, a sharing of joy and sorrow and problems, was the great thing; had not Aspasia been the inspiration of Pericles?

Left alone in the garden, Phryne caught up the scroll of the Iliad, and mouthed the golden lines; they were intoxicating as the air itself, and she rendered them with a passionate delight, a feeling, an elegance which was marvelous to hear. As the liquid music of her voice came to a pause, another voice broke in:

"Bravo! Never before have I heard poetry declaimed with such loveliness, upon such lovely lips!"

Phryne glanced up, in startled surprise and anger.

"Hello!" she exclaimed, with a touch of rough Bœotian slang. "Who left the door open?"

Hyperides laughed, as he came forward and saluted her.

"I bribed your servants to let me enter unannounced. Forgive them, and forgive me; I craved a sight of beauty unaware, dear Phryne. The fault was wholly mine."

Her face cleared. She looked up at him with a sunny smile.

"You're irresistible, and you know it! Hyperides, where the devil did you get your magic? You're not handsome; you have a glib tongue, but that's not rare in Athens; and yet, somehow, with all your drawbacks, you do contrive to say the right thing at the right time!"

He was a dark, shrewd man, famed for his knowledge of language and speech; The Rhetorician, they called him in the city. Wealthy and unscrupulous, a born lawyer, he knew every twist and turn of legal phraseology. And behind this was a certain magic, as she said—a deep knowledge of men's hearts and minds, and the innate character which gave him an ability to play upon them as upon a lyre.

"And yet, Phryne," he said, almost sadly, "not all my wit nor wealth nor clever speech can make you love me!"

"That's true," she rejoined. "And the reason, Hyperides, I think, is that you provoke an instinct of combat in me. Instead of flinging my arms about your neck, I want to fight you off, match my wit against yours, pit myself against you!"

"It's a pity," he said with a sigh. "You and I together could do great things; I need your invigorating energy, your daring, your courage, to back me up in various matters. I've just returned from Chios, where I've been handling that involved old tangle of Demetrios vs. the Chian Wine Corporation, that goes back to the time of the Persian wars, and I think it's all straightened out. I'm practically sure of the decision."

"You would be," she commented. "Alas, of your fee."

He laughed lightly. "Of course! I tried to find you at the Temple of Venus last night after my boat got in; I was hungry for a sight of you. But you were not there."

"No; I don't go on duty till next month," she rejoined.

"Good! I'm going to lay siege to your heart, I warn you! I've brought you back some lovely doves, and a cask of the finest wine in Chios."

PHRYNE shrugged, with a return of her irritation.

"My dear Hyperides, can't you make love with something better than presents?"

"How?"

"I don't know. If I were ever on my knees to you in an agony of fear—if you could do something no other man on earth could do—oh, I don't know!" She flung out her arms in futile despair. "That's just it; I don't know! I'm sick of these petty, ordinary men who are all alike; I feel that I can only love a man who stands out from the mob, a man who has the courage to carve out some new course, to do something different, whether right or

wrong! Skopas could do it, but he lacks the backbone. You could do it, and you're too wary, too sure of every step. I want a man who can gamble magnificently!"

"I see you're in poetical mood," said Hyperides dryly, with a gesture toward the *Iliad*. "The heroes are all dead, my dear. We're living in a practical age. You're like all the younger generation. You want to live dangerously; you seek thrills and new experiences. You'll take any kind of a chance, if you can only do something no one has done before, or shock the world and thereby get a tremendous kick out of it!"

She bent a lazy, half-affectionate smile upon him.

"Hyperides, you must be a mind-reader! Decidedly, you fall in with my mood. But you don't seem very upset by it all."

"I'm not," said the lawyer cheerfully. "I can wait. There comes a time when your type of girl falls, and falls hard. As you just now said—when you're on your knees to me in an agony of fear, then you'll realize my true worth."

"On my knees to you? Zeus forbid!" she exclaimed scornfully. Then she melted. "But I do like you, really. And I'll prove it by letting you walk with me as far as the Temple of Poseidon."

"Why on earth are you going there?" demanded Hyperides in surprise. She laughed gayly.

"Because when there was a storm the other day, I vowed a sacrifice to the sea-god if a friend of mine came safely home from sea; and I must go and pay for it."

"A friend? At sea?" He stared at her, half-comprehending. "You can't mean—"

"You, stupid! Of course!" With a burst of laughter, she rose, slipped on her sandals, and flected a corner of the blue transparent robe over her head. "Come on."

"Then you do care a little!" Hyperides cried joyfully.

"Nonsense! I thought I might need a lawyer one of these days," she retorted. "Ready?"

SO, together, they left the hillside house and walked to the sea-god's temple, where Phryne handed over clinking gold to pay for the sacrifice of a white bull—no small amount, either. Hyperides, rather moved, knelt in a prayer of thanksgiving for his safe return. When he came to his feet, she was gone, and only the lingering echo of silver laughter sounded from the busy street when he rushed out in search of her.

She tripped lightly home, her face covered as usual. Her name flew along the streets as she passed; men turned to look after her, eagerly; shops were emptied for a glimpse of her, whose face was seldom seen of men in general. "Phryne is going by! Phryne the divine is passing! Phryne, the Toad!"

That was the meaning of her name. They had given her the nickname years ago, when the poet Memnon, at some banquet, had compared her mobile, animated face to a sun-flashing wave of the sea.

"Ha!" shouted somebody. "A green wave! She must be green in the face like a toad!"

The name had stuck; and Phryne, proudly swearing it would become the most beloved name in Athens, had made it an emblem of conquest and achievement.

THAT night a dozen scholars, poets and philosophers reclined in the banquet-room of Phryne's house; they ate and drank, and as the heady wine took effect, waxed eloquent. This was no wild orgy, but a feast of the intellect. It was only thirty years since Alexander had conquered the world, and these men could speak at first hand of Plato, of Socrates, of Euripides and a dozen more, as the wine was passed around.

But Phryne, fleeing her guests, sat by the fountain in the garden, and there in the starlight talked with the tormented man who had sought her out.

Skopas gulped down the wine she thrust at him, and took heart. At first he had scarcely been able to speak, for his tumult of soul, but her warm fragrant presence rallied him, and the wine gave him tongue.

"May the gods forgive me! I'll do it, Phryne; if you still demand it, I'll do it for love of you. Yet I beg you to give up the wild idea!"

"Of course I demand it. Come, dear friend, be calm," she said, and put her cool slim hand on his. "Why, your pulse is racing like mad! Take it calmly, Skopas. Tell me, first, how it will be arranged."

"Simply enough, after all," he said in a wretched voice. "Young Heracles, the cobbler's son, is a la-de-da sort of chap, as you may know; rather effeminate. He was to take the rôle of the Muse, Clio, who brings a message from the gods in—a certain part of the work. He's badly in debt. Well, I've squared him, that's all, on a pretext that somebody else wants

his part. He's going to a farm in Bœotia on Monday, for a drinking-party with some friends. Nobody else will know he's not taking the part assigned him. You'll meet me late Monday afternoon. I'll reserve a room at the Temple Tavern in Eleusis. I'll have the costume and mask, and will coach you in your part. You can go directly from the tavern, masked and costumed, to the temple with me."

Phryne caught her breath, and clapped her hands softly.

"Splendid!" she cried with enthusiasm. "Splendid! Why, Skopas, you're wonderful!"

"I don't feel that way," he retorted bitterly. "It means betrayal, treachery—"

"Nonsense! It means just this!" she exclaimed, and in an ecstasy of delight flung back her robe. She drew his hand to her, placed it on her heart, and her arms twined about his neck. "This, Skopas—my lips, myself, my love! I promised you as much; I keep my word. Kiss me, Skopas, and think only that the gods are kind, and approve what you've done! For if they did not approve of your devotion, they would certainly interfere and prevent the matter!"

The argument was rather good, to the mind of Skopas; and much better was the proof of it. When Phryne was in generous mood, she gave with all her heart and soul; and if her generosity toward Skopas was merely an impetuous, momentary giving, provoked by elation, it was none the less effective.

When they separated, in the cool starlight, Skopas had forgotten all remorse, all his wretched self-accusations; he was in for it now, with a swagger and a wild brave laugh, and so rapt in his love as to be blind to all else.

But Phryne, returning to her party of poets and philosophers, amazed them all by the brilliance of her wit, by the blazing eloquence of her tongue, and by the triumphant exultation of her dancing. She danced for them as never before had she danced, while old Statiros the Stoic wheezed a drunken melody on the pipes, and the Cretan sage Idomeneos cocked a wreath askew on his ruffled gray locks and clashed away at the cymbals. It was a wild, delirious, ecstatic dance; and Cleon the poet wrote a rhapsodic poem about it which may be read to this day in the Bacchic Anthology.

BUT on the Monday afternoon, in an upstairs room of the Temple Tavern at Eleusis, a different scene took place.

The fourteen-mile highway out from Athens had been crowded most of the day. There were the officers and participants in the Mysteries, several hundred in all. There were the young men, who were about to be initiated into the first degree that evening, some boisterous, some half fearful; for all agreed, solemnly, that this initiation was a dread and terrible experience that touched more upon death than on life. Then there were the masses of men who formed the main body of the mystic brotherhood, most of them in hilarious mood, so that every wineshop in Eleusis was crammed to the doors, and the rollicking old soldier song about the red-haired girl from Babylon was roared forth on all sides, with the unpublished verses Alexander's army had brought back from Persia.

IN the upper room at the Tavern, the excited and eager Phryne listened to all that her tutor told her, learned her part perfectly, listened intently to his grave coaching. Skopas, beneath his outward desperate calm, was in a state of nervous panic. The Mysteries would continue for two more nights, and the prospect appalled him.

"Whatever happens, keep your head!" he cautioned the girl. "Tonight occurs the crime, the murder; tomorrow night, the tomb scenes, the appeal to the gods; and on the final night, the story of resurrection—the fertility symbolism. For two thousand years and more, this drama has been played out on this very spot, and kept secret. Remember, it's death for both of us if you're suspected!"

Phryne smiled. "You should worry, my dear. You were willing to die for me, you know."

"But not in too unpleasant a fashion," replied Skopas gloomily. "That rascal Hyperides would love to see me out of his way. I met him today, and he smiled in a way I don't half like, and flung out a dark hint that Athens might not be too healthy a place for some people he knew. . . . Well, well, now go over the passages once more!"

She did so, and he nodded in satisfaction. Then she bared her bosom, and he bound her breasts tightly with cloths. Her golden hair was cut and trimmed, and darkened with a wash of color. When she was dressed in the robe of a Master of the Mysteries, Skopas gave her the cloak that represented her costume, and over her sweet face placed the simpering mask of the Muse, Clio, binding it firmly

in place. She walked across the room and back, imitating the walk of a man, and he nodded.

"Perfect! Come, then."

They went together, and were lost in the scurrying throngs passing into the temple enclosure.

THE stage fronted the huge courtyard. Torches and cressets smoked into the night sky, lighting the serried masses of faces, thousands upon thousands jamming every nook and cranny. Off stage, watching, waiting, Phryne had no fear whatever. The imposture was easy beyond belief. Compliments were showered on her by the other actors, who vowed that for once young Heracles had a rôle that suited him admirably. Soon she would pass on the stage, give her single speech, and take her place opposite the chorus.

Her cue was approaching. As she awaited it tensely, there was a commotion behind her. A sudden voice uprose:

"There he is, yonder. In the part of *Clio*."

A panting, straining-eyed man was shoved forward to the side of Phryne.

"Master Heracles! I've run all the way—your old father has had a stroke. He begs you to come to his side as soon as— By the immortals, this is not my master!" The man broke off, staring around. "This is not Heracles, I tell you! Look at his hands!"

Others came crowding around. Phryne heard her cue from the stage. She made a hasty effort to break through the circle and escape to the stage. Half a dozen hands caught hold of her. With an angry cry, she sought to break clear; and then, so swiftly that she scarcely realized it, disaster engulfed her. Someone jerked at her robe, disclosing her white thigh. Another hand wrenched at her mask, and laid bare her face.

"Profaned! The Mysteries are profaned! A woman, a woman!"

The wild, shrill yell halted everything; and then, voice upon wolfish voice, rose the infernal howl of the pack for blood—her blood.

She chilled to it. An awful, insuperable terror struck into her, as the whole place shook with the yells for vengeance. No one, as yet, knew who she was. The robe was pulled half away, confirming the cheat.

"Make her the victim of the ritual!" went up the pealing yells. "Tear her to pieces! Rip the flesh from her!"

Luckily, the crowd could not get at her, here in the wings; the maddened thousands threatened to tear the very stones of the theater apart. The temple guards closed around her, and the priests of Demeter. Someone reached her with one fearful blow across the face, that brought blood from her mouth and nostrils; then she was hustled away into a rear room of the temple, safe and under guard, but sobbing hysterically, smeared with blood, shaking with stark terror as the ravening shouts mounted higher and higher.

What happened out there? She did not know, could never be certain. Into those thundering voices, however, came a sudden yelping satisfaction, a blood-excitement, as dogs yelp with heart-hurried tongues when the kill takes place. After that, the noise somewhat died down.

The room in which she lay was filled with figures, staring at her. Priests of the temple, and with them masked actors, the chief players in the Mysteries. In her frantic terror, she shrieked to them for mercy, for pity. They talked of taking her forth, stripping her, and handing her over to the mob.

Suddenly a new voice was heard, a new figure pushed forward. It was Hyperides, who stood looking coldly at her for a moment, then turned and addressed the others.

"Brethren," he said in his compelling tones, "wait one moment! Our brother Skopas has paid for his folly and weakness; that is just and fitting. But it is not fitting that a woman should be slain in this holy place. Do you know this woman, whom Skopas introduced? No; but I do. She has committed an offense against the gods, against the whole city! Better let her be taken to Athens and brought before the tribunal of the Helias; we have avenged the broken oaths of Skopas; let the courts avenge the affront to the laws!"

"Who is she, Hyperides?" came the beating questions.

"Phryne, the Hetaira."

NOW there was fresh tumult of incredulity and amazement, as this news spread. Vaguely, Phryne realized that Skopas had been caught and killed, somehow; it did not matter. Amid the clatter of tongues, she cried out to Hyperides not to desert her. He looked down and spoke, so that no one else heard.

"Quiet, you little fool! Don't wipe your face; leave it all bloody."

She relaxed, as she had been flung by the guards, and lay quiet. Her quick wits began to recover from the paralyzing spasm of terror. Hyperides had come to the rescue, then! She heard his voice, through the confused uproar in the room. Bad enough, he said, to have shed her blood at all on this holy ground. The priests agreed; she, as she lay, deftly smeared the drops from her nostrils across her face, so that she seemed badly enough hurt.

The arguments of Hyperides won over inflamed passions. When he pointed out that Phryne was in the service of Venus, the priests instantly demanded that the secular authority take her in charge.

Bound and beaten, she was sneaked out of the temple by a side passage, and there forced into a closed litter. Soldiers guarding her closely, they took the road to Athens.

ALREADY Athens was in tumult, for rumors had spread that a woman had profaned the Mysteries. Once more the ravening mob-voices rose, demanding blood; and Phryne, who had revived to the point of demanding luxuries and comforts in her prison, was only too thankful when she was flung headlong into a cell and left with bread and water—but safe from the wild throngs who sought to tear her into bits.

And there, for three days, she remained in the cell, alone, uncared-for, like a wild beast. Crowds came thronging to look upon her, flinging mud at her through the bars; the guards saw to it that no actual harm was done her. To her wild demands for comfort, assistance, an advocate, deaf ears were turned.

Now, for the first time, her audacious spirit failed her. Gone was all the

glamour of life; she crouched in a corner, unable to escape the mud that spattered her, the curses that rained upon her. And in her heart dwelt fear, deeper and deeper, as the throngs outside her cell door voiced savage demands for her life-blood.

ON the third evening, when there was no one else by, a guard thrust a stool into her cell, gave her the evening ration of bread and water, and announced a visitor.

Hyperides entered, seated himself on the stool, and greeted her with a low chuckle.

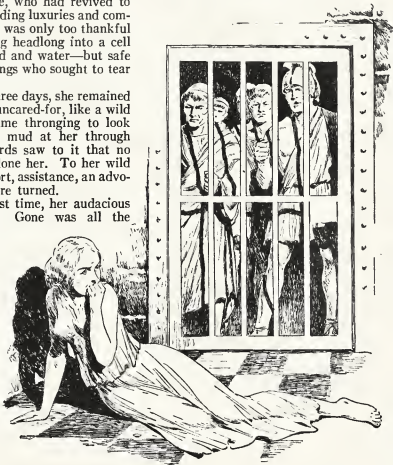
"Well, my dear, things seem going excellently!"

"You too?" she retorted. "I thought you were a friend. 'Excellent!' Then you too are against me."

She burst into tears, sobs shaking her mud-spattered body.

"Nonsense!" said the lawyer calmly. "I've been appointed to defend you. Tomorrow at sunrise, you come before the tribunal of the Heliasts for sentence."

She quivered. "Tomorrow!"



For three days she remained in the cell, alone, uncared-for, like a wild beast.

"Precisely. Of course, as you're well aware, no human being can save you."

In a paroxysm of terror, she flung herself at his feet, begging for help—a knife, a vial of poison, anything to save her from the torture.

"Suppose," asked Hyperides, "I do what no other man on earth can do? I trust you recall our conversation on the subject."

IN the dim light from the torch that burned outside the door, she stared at him. He remained inscrutable, calm, a trifle quizzical.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked in a low voice.

He reached out and touched her head, with caressing fingers.

"My dear, I've never ceased to love you. As you, in your heart, love me. Come, confess it!"

"Yes, Hyperides," she said humbly. "It is true. I can tell you now; if you can save me from my own mad folly, I am yours, and yours only. But it's so hopeless! You can't do it."

"Let's see about that," he returned. "You've done something that'll go down in history; luckily for yourself, you learned so little about the actual Mysteries that there's no particular reason to shut your mouth with a gravestone. For three days you've lain here while the people have worn out their rage. By tomorrow they'll be ready to swing around, given the proper publicity and stimulus. I have fifty men ready to go about town tonight and start the campaign in your favor. The pendulum of public opinion—you remember the stories about Aristides, of course."

"Public opinion! Who cares about that?" she demanded wildly.

"I do; I don't want to see you banished," he rejoined. "It would be inconvenient if I had to go into exile with you. The publicity I'll get from winning this case will bring me all the paying law business in Athens, my dear."

"By winning it?" she repeated. "You mean—you can save me?"

"Of course. Up to this point, I've handled matters adroitly," he said complacently, "if I do say it myself. Now, in the morning, I want you to look your best."

"Look my best!" A bitter laugh escaped her. "All Athens has stared at me for three days in this pigsty. I haven't even a clean peplos; how can I look my best?"

"That's my business," said Hyperides. "I'll have your slaves here before day-break, with whatever clothes you direct; they'll bathe you, arrange your hair, perfume you, see that you're at your best and loveliest. There's no mark from the blow on your face?"

"I think not," she replied. "My nose is still sore, but the swelling's gone down."

"It was a great stroke of luck that I was able to wangle the sunrise session of court," he said thoughtfully. "You see, the judges are nearly all elderly fellows. They'll be up early; they'll come to court with the memory of their wives all too clear-cut in mind; frowsy, sleepy women, mussed and disheveled, fit to give any man the horrors. Then they see you, fresh and lovely as rosy-fingered Aurora herself—"

"Oh, stop it," broke in Phryne impatiently. "You can't win this case with a pretty face, Hyperides. It's too serious."

"I know it. That's why I intend to demand the death-penalty."

"You— *What?*" Her voice broke. "By the gods, are you crazy?"

"Crazy like a fox, my dear," he said, chuckling softly. "You'll see!"

"Well, what's the defense to be?" she demanded. "I can't lie out of it. You can't pull any sob-story about a dying mother and the innocent virtue of a young girl, the way you did in the Simonides affair; I'm too well known. What line are you going to work on?"

"That, my dear, is my business," he replied coolly. "My entire plea will consist of five words, and they'll win the case. What are they? No, by the gods! I'd not breathe them into the ear of Apollo himself! They stay locked in my own brain, until they're uttered." He rose. "Now get all the sleep you can, and trust to me, my dear."

He stooped, touched his lips to her forehead, and strode out.

Somehow he inspired confidence; his vivid personality had an appeal, an overpowering influence like magic itself. For the first time Phryne dropped off to a slumber that was undisturbed by nightmares of blood and vengeance and horror. She slept, and slept soundly.

WITH earliest dawn, terror returned as she was roused by guards; but it was only her two tiring-slaves, who greeted her with tears of joy. They had brought everything, and they fell to work



Drawn by John Richard Flanagan

She danced for them as never before had she danced, while old Statiros the Stoic wheezed a drunken melody on the pipes, and Idomeneos cocked a wreath askew on his ruffled gray locks.

with soap and water and cosmetics and perfumes, shampooing her hair into golden luster, going over every inch of her glorious body, and rubbing her into a tingle and a glow of color.

Just as the guards came to take her before the tribunal in the rising sun, they were done. Her gossamer blue robe with the silver doves was drawn over her head as usual, and between the steel-clad guards, she set out on her fateful journey.

Her guards were silent; the streets and housetops were silent, although jammed with people. She had shrunk from the thought of this procession, past the Pompeion to the Eleusinian Gate, outside which the tribunal sat. She had anticipated new curses, new yells for vengeance. Instead, there came only silence, and low whispers. Once or twice a shrill voice was lifted against her, but it died quickly.

She perceived that Hyperides had been right. Public opinion had swung around—helped, no doubt, by the fifty men working hard the previous night with suggestion and clever words.

NOW the huge court of the Pompeion was past; here was the city gate. Outside, the high marble tribunal was shut off from the crowds by armed guards. At sight of it, Phryne's steps for a moment; then she recovered and went on.

The judges were waiting; the prosecutor and Hyperides were waiting. A bailiff led her to her position in front of the judges, grave and elderly citizens, for the most part. The sun had just mounted the eastern sky, and the flood of level golden light pierced through that veiled and humble figure, lightly revealing the tender lines below the blue transparent robe. The judges stirred a little, leaned forward. Court was opened.

Hyperides came forward, greeted Phryne, and spoke under his breath.

"All's going well. Now, for the love of the gods, don't open your mouth! No matter what I say or do, keep quiet!"

"Agreed," she said in a low voice.

He turned, and went to the prosecutor, and spoke rapidly. The dour, harsh-eyed prosecutor stared at him in amazement, then frowned.

"Very well, Hyperides. But if this is one of your damned shyster tricks, look out!"

"It is not. I swear by Apollo,"—and Hyperides lifted his hand toward the sun, speaking earnestly,—“to do exactly as I say.”

The other grunted assent. Together they approached the judges, and the prosecutor spoke out.

"Your honors, if it please you, we've agreed to waive prosecution. Counsel for the defense stipulates that there is no defense, that his client pleads guilty, and that he himself will demand the death-penalty. Under these circumstances, I am content to save the time of the court by permitting him to speak—reserving, however," he added with dour suspicion, "the right to object."

"You shall have no cause to object, upon my honor!" said Hyperides.

The judges conferred, and promptly agreed in the matter. The clerk of court then read the accusation. It set forth—and it made undeniably ghastly hearing for Phryne—the crimes of the accused against gods and men, by her deliberate profanation of the sublime Mysteries. No words were spared in describing her offense against the state and its institutions, and against the gods and against religion.

The chief justice turned to Hyperides.

"Does your client plead guilty or not guilty?"

"My lord," said Hyperides, "it was established in the case of Epaminondas *vs.* Glauco, in the fourth year of the Macedonian régime, that in any case involving sacrilege, counsel is not allowed to plead for his client. The prisoner must plead in person."

The chief justice nodded and turned to Phryne. "Prisoner, you have heard the accusations. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

PHRYNE looked up, startled and confused and bewildered. The urbane smile of Hyperides became almost a grin, as she threw back the corner of the robe, baring her lovely face.

"Why — why — yes, I'm guilty, of course," floated the soft music of her voice, more beautiful than ever in its agitation. "I'm sorry, with all my heart. The fault was—"

"That will do," said the chief justice. "The plea is guilty. Counsel will proceed. We shall have no need for the assembled witnesses, I take it?"

"There is no evasion, no excuse, no denial," said Hyperides; and the prosecutor nodded agreement. Then, with a glance at the faces of the judges, Hyperides stepped to the side of Phryne and turned, ignoring her pleading, terrified eyes, her pallid features.

"Citizens of Athens," he said abruptly, his voice ringing in the tense silence, "I shall attempt no oratory to confuse the issue. Here, it is clear-cut. Indeed, as a pious and devout servant of the gods, I have no choice. I believe that you are with me, and that every citizen of Athens is with me, in feeling that this woman should suffer death."

He paused. Phryne swayed slightly, half opened her mouth as though to protest, then remembered his admonition and remained silent. But from the serried throng outside the line of armed guards arose a swift tumult of cries—and Hyperides gave them full time to register on the judges.

"No, *no!* She is in the service of Venus! She's too beautiful to die! No! We're not with you. No, *no!*"

Urbanely disdainful, Hyperides went on with his marvelous smooth eloquence:

"Athenians, there is no argument, no evasion. Banishment or exile cannot be the sentence in a case of sacrilege. One penalty, and one penalty alone, can be imposed: that of death. As citizens and judges, you may of course acquit this woman; but if you find her guilty, you must decree her to death. And," he added impressively, "I demand it! I demand nothing less—"

As though the words were a signal, the crowded masses broke into catcalls and boos. These grew, from scattered voices into wildly vociferous yells of dissent. Hyperides seemed not at all astonished by this evidence of popular indignation; perhaps he had even expected it. When the tumult was silenced, he went on:

"Citizens, judges, there is no more to say. I demand that you sentence this woman to death; I demand that you decree her to be given the cup of hemlock, that her body may become black and bloated and misshapen. I demand that you decree her to be pierced by the sword. I demand,"—and his voice became stentorian,—"I demand that you sentence her to death, if—"

He reached out suddenly, caught hold of Phryne's blue robe, and with one movement jerked it clear of her body.

"If you have the heart!" he concluded, and stepped away.

SO unexpected was his action, that it was absolutely stupefying. Phryne, left nude except for her golden sandals, uttered a low, bewildered cry. She stood

in utmost confusion for a moment, the level rays of the morning sun transfusing all the exquisite lines of her body into golden glory.

No actress could have assumed this posture of affrighted modesty; it rendered her a thousandfold more beautiful, more lovely. She reached out her arms with an imploring word, a gesture of appeal, but Hyperides snatched the robe away from her reaching hands. The touch of pantomime was so genuine, so graceful, so obviously unstaged, that one surging breath of awe and delight burst from all the crowded citizens, and swelled into a roar of acclaim and applause, a roar that swept up and was sustained.

Hyperides, with one glance at the faces of the judges, handed back the blue robe, and Phryne donned it in haste. The judges were hastily conferring. Hyperides turned away, and was met by the prosecutor, who came close to him and spoke in a low, intense voice.

"You dirty chiseler! Some day I'll get you for this!"

Hyperides bowed slightly, mockingly.

"My dear counselor," he said with his cynic smile, "you should praise the gods daily, because they bestow upon you the inestimable gift of hope! Listen—there's the verdict!"

His words were drowned in a roar of applause and delight from the crowd.

THE roar died; silence fell. Here was the garden once more, the picture on the easel, the studio all around; I was back in the present, staring at Peder Cavanagh. He had actually bewitched me, or I had bewitched myself under the magic of his voice and personality.

"Like it?" he asked, smiling.

I drew a deep breath. "You're a genius, confound you! Why, you really brought that slick lawyer to life; you made him a flesh-and-blood person; you created a shyster and made me like him!"

Cavanagh grinned.

"A shyster lawyer is human, like you or me; what's to prevent liking him? As a rule, he's quite a popular fellow, except among the pompous stuffed shirts who hide their own dirty work behind legal technicalities. Boy, when it comes to a choice between a hypocrite and a confessed trickster, give me the trickster every time!"

Even when Peder Cavanagh is ethically wrong, you have to agree with him.

The second story in this series, "The Daughter of the Moon," is scheduled for our forthcoming May issue.

Monkey Money

By KENNETH PERKINS

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

IT was best not to put a finger in anyone else's business in that seaport. But the girl was an American and very frightened about something. She kept wandering from the flower-banked veranda to the desk in the lobby.

The brown house-boy at the desk said: "Your father just sent a message that he'll be back in a few minutes. Nothing has happened."

A man stepped from behind a great potted fern from where, half-hidden, he had been watching her. He manipulated the cigar-cutter, then said casually: "I'd tell your father to take the next boat back to the States, if you asked me."

The girl flared around at him, her blue gaze level and hard. "But I didn't manage to ask you, whoever you are."

"Sorry. None of my business."

He went out to the veranda, where he flopped to a rattan chair with a book, his thin grim face flushed wet because of the heat—and also because of that look with which the girl had burned him. The book was in Spanish and treated of Central American flowers. He had picked it up from a table, for he wanted to read something, and this was as good a subject as any. But after a sentence or two his eyes wandered.

They rested on the most vivid spot, the girl's hair. She had followed him.

"I guess I was pretty rude," she said. "It's because my nerves are so jumpy."

He stood up, dumb for a moment. America seemed very close with this straight-shouldered, clear-eyed girl facing him. She belonged in open free air, not in this scented heat. He thought of his little sister coming to him once, frightened because a big dog was snooping around her playhouse.

"What did you mean?" she asked.

"Just what I said. It's a bad town. I heard your father had come ashore yesterday gunning for a man named Carter. I know Carter. Your dad will be gunned down first."

She measured him, breathing hard. He was tall and rough and young. "I guess I'll tell you why I gave you a cold shoulder. All the white men in this town, I mean the Americans, are either gun-fighters or on the beach. That's what I was warned when we left the ship—the freighter out there. I was told not to pick up with anybody."

"My name's Brad Pike. I had a coffee plantation up in the mountains, which failed."

"On the beach, then?"

"I have my business. Right now I'm studying the resources here to see if I can't recoup." He showed her the book on flowers. "I studied agriculture at College. I'm more interested in botany."

Her eyes softened. "I made quite a mistake. You don't look like a student of botany to me."

"It's just a side-line."

"You see, I thought you might be like all the rest of them, fighting mad, hot-headed fools. I met some on board who got off at Honduras. They did nothing but talk of guns till I'm sick of hearing the word. But I reckon"—her eyes went down to his hips—"you aren't a fighting man or you'd be wearing a gun like the rest."

"No need of a gun except at the banana stations, or higher up in the coffee belt—just for show, to make the pickers step."

THE doubt and strain left her eyes abruptly. She was like his little sister again, after being told the dog wouldn't bite. She stepped closer as if to reach for his hands.

"I need some one to help me—need him badly. Some one to talk to."

"I'm ready."

"You've got some sense. You know that shooting up folks isn't the way to get what you want. My father came all the way from Texas to get Carter. He gave his savings to Carter, so we have nothing left but the cow ranch, and no cows. Carter said he'd made a lot down

You can't always tell a fighting man by his appearance—as witness this spirited story.



The trouble was, Brad Pike had suppressed himself too long. . . . His gun flicked out—roared.

here in sugar and bananas. But he hasn't cleared an acre of ground in four years. He just kept the money."

"An old Central American custom."

"Tell my father he can't collect that debt. Tell him we've got to go home. Make him go."

A house-boy came out to the veranda and told Brad Pike that he had visitors waiting for him in his room.

He caught the girl staring at him. Again he had that strange new hunger—for a home. The confident smile she gave him started thrills in his body. The sounds in the thick air changed for him: The low rumble of the volcano across the Bay, the jingle of mules' bells out in the street, the marimba in the saloon

next door, were all woven into a new melody, peaceful and simple.

He said casually: "I'll get your dad out. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not—any more."

Upstairs in his room Brad Pike found two hot-eyed young Creoles waiting for him. One had a scarred fattish cheek and bulging glasses which magnified the patriotic frenzy of his eyes. The other had the oval pensive face of a poet.

Pike said: "The guns will be in Todos Santos before dark."

"But where is your boat?"

"At Toucan River, hidden in the mangrove swamps."

"Magnificent!" The poet had a straw-covered bottle and poured wine into thick

glasses at the washstand. "But it's twenty miles from the river to here."

"I said the guns will be here," Pike was looking out of the window, uninterested. He remembered the girl's opinion: "You don't look like a fighting man." It made him see red. The color distilled itself in his mind and concentrated on two crimson flowers at the seaward end of the patio. He could see them from his window, and they made perfect targets. So she thought he was only interested in flowers!

HE reached for his gun, which hung holstered on the mosquito-net post. Needless to say, he had not strapped it on when he went down to the lobby. Those red flowers impressed him as a pretty trick in marksmanship. But he checked himself, remembering that the girl trusted him "because he had some sense."

"Here's the manifest," he said absent-mindedly, "and the expense for the trip. I used up all your money, you can see."

The poetic one looked over the items, the consignment of firearms purchased in New Orleans, pay to the crew, bribes to the train-dispatcher, engineer and brakeman of the banana railway.

"And your commission?"

"I deposited it in a New Orleans bank. I've learned my lesson about bringing gold into this country."

"Very wise, Señor Pike, especially since you will probably be arrested before the afternoon is over. But don't worry about that. We will get you out with your own guns, when the revolution starts. It can't fail now!"

"Fail!" The man with glasses snorted. "Why, since you were seen in Todos Santos yesterday, the Administration's bonds have fallen twenty points. They know you are outfitting our army. Your health, beloved friend!"

"To liberty and honor," the poet said, handing him a tumbler.

They drank, and the one with the spectacles said: "You had no trouble?" He put a fat arm about Pike's shoulder.

"The Coast Patrol tried to board us when we were hauling past San Luis Volcano."

"But no casualties?"

"Oh, well," Pike shrugged. "A few. They stood off fast when I gave it to 'em."

"They ran away when they knew it was Señor Pike shooting at them!" the poet said fervently. "They know, as all

of us know, that Señor Brad Pike is the greatest gun-fighter of the Coast!"

They left him to finish the bottle while they went down by the outside stairs and prowled through the green shadows of the patio. . . .

When Pike went down to the veranda, he saw a bony man with a roan mustache talking to the girl. The hot blue eyes of both, the straightness of their backs, the gentleness of their drawl, were perhaps the only points in common between this gaunt, burned cattleman and the fragile imitation of his flesh and blood, his daughter Hallie.

"This is Mr. Pike, Dad. He's going to help us. He knows all about Todos Santos and Carter, and everything that's going on. He's all right."

They shook hands hard. "Reckon I'll need help. Carter's sicked the Customs on me. They say my passport's no good because of what I put down for '*Object of travel.*' A new way to sagebrush a stranger. Have a drink? They say I've got to go back home on the same boat. I'll smoke up this whole damned town! By the way, where's your gun?"

"He doesn't like guns any more than I do," Hallie said. "He's here studying plants, flowers and things like that. There are some men who aren't always on the prod, Dad."

Roan Jackson's mouth went down at the side as if to say something underhanded. "Flowers! Say, listen: I thought my daughter said you were going to help me."

"You can't get a man like Carter with a gun," Pike said. "Better play his own game."

"I'm not a crook."

"You're dealing with one. He's used your money for what they call a 'running account' down here. He gets twelve per cent on his bank balance, and loans the Administration good chunks against the export duty on sugar. He's the collector himself, so he can't lose. He collects in gold and pays his own bills in scrip. He's got any pit boss in your Texas *baile* houses backed off the map."

JACKSON unflapped a holster. He had two guns on his bony thighs. He drew one, a weapon a gleam with oil, its clean bore shining like silver.

"I got one card to deal in any game like that," he said, and fired at that little red flower on the beach. The psychology of seeing red had directed his anger at that same perfect target.



Pike plunged. "Say, listen, Carter: I'm in a jam. I want your help."

The report shattered the dark air, sending up a flutter of pigeons and parrots, summoning pop-eyed house-boys from the doors of the American Club Hotel.

"Dad, you're simply crazy!"

"If you could do that, son," Roan Jackson said out of the side of his mouth, "I'd take you on as a pardner. But being you're only interested in flowers as such, you're not much use to me."

The flower was not there any more. But there was the second one, ten yards farther—a perfect bull's-eye against the rolling white of the surf beyond. Pike's fingers itched. He would like to show this old blowfly something. But it was not the way to build that home he had imagined. He had sworn that he was to be, from now on, the man Hallie Jackson thought he was. He lit a cigar to calm his fingers.

The patio, before they were aware of it, was filled with barefooted soldiers who looked as if they had slung their shoulder-holsters and khaki jackets over their pajamas. One had a green coat with a lot of frayed gold braid.

Roan Jackson, with his daughter in his arms, jumped behind the adobe arch. He drew his other gun. The hotel manager came out waddling, wringing his fat hands.

"It is nothing, Señor Capitan!" he pleaded, running down to the soldiers in the patio. "My guests, *Americanos*, they are just showing how a pistol will shoot. Shooting into the surf. No harm."

"It is not for that, that I am here," the man in the green coat and braid

said, without removing his cigar. "I am here to arrest the *Americano*, Brad Pike."

Roan Jackson and his daughter turned blankly to Pike. Roan still had both his guns out.

"Hear that, son?"

"Sure, I heard it. They want to arrest me."

"But what for?" Hallie gasped.

"Never mind what for!" her father snapped back. "He's an American, and so am I! They're spreading a pretty big loop—the saddle-colored warts! Here, son, take this iron. If they step on this veranda, we'll salt 'em. You get out of the way, Hallie. Run upstairs. We're going to have a little party. Men only."

Pike felt the gun thrust into his fist. The balance of it sent a pleasant vibration up his forearm and into his shoulder and down his chest like a drink. It would be fun to play with the Commandante's soldiers with a pat hand like this! The old cattleman, of course, could pick off six. Having but one gun left, he would doubtless fan.

A feeling of wildness raked Brad Pike's nerves. His eyes snapped sidewise at the scarecrow squad: Two fat old men, two negroes, three boys, a runt. Alone, Pike himself could drop them like bowling-pins.

But he caught the terrified look on Hallie's face, and so he said: "There'll be no fighting, Mr. Jackson."

"Well, dad burn my soul, what sort of a sheep-man are you, anyway? I'll curl 'em up myself. Just stand behind my back and see they don't hit me in the suspenders."

"I said I wasn't fighting, Mr. Jackson."

Pike gave back the gun and stepped down to the patio. The Captain saluted, respectfully removing his cigar, although he had to hold it with his saluting hand.

"It is with great regret, Señor Pike—"

"Cut the speeches, Capitan, and keep your voice down when you answer me." Pike spoke so no one else could hear. "Why arrest me when I've already landed the guns? If you find my yawl, you'll find no cargo."

"It is my duty only to take you to the Commandante."

"I want to see Carter first."

"Why, certainly, señor. We will march that way, and perhaps stop at the Casino for a drink. You, I, my squad."

Pike sent a house-boy to get his hat. Waiting, he looked back at the veranda. The girl was smaller, wilted all of a sudden. He knew how bewildered and helpless she was. With her father ready to fight at the drop of a hat, and Brad Pike no longer curbing him, she had nothing to cling to. He went up to her.

"I wish you'd stay in this hotel till I get back."

There was excitement in her eyes.

"You're coming back—right away?"

"Not till I've seen Carter about this debt he owes you."

Roan Jackson grinned dryly. "Think you can bluff him?" He shook his head,

chuckling, then checked himself when he saw Pike's eyes turn a chilly gray. He started pulling at his roan mustache, wondering what there was about this ranny that he could not quite make out.

WITH the squad of ragged soldiers lagging single file behind them, Brad Pike and the Captain marched across the drowsy plaza to the business center of Todos Santos.

Chickens pecked in the street, avoiding the sleeping dogs. Naked babies playing in the dust were packed off into tin-roofed huts. It was significant. Their mothers had heard doubtless that the *Americano* Brad Pike was in town for a purpose that involved smoke. Brad Pike, it was said, was a bad hombre. He drank. By that, one meant he drank like an *Americano*. He fired at Government men who came to collect tribute from him. He went to sea in a boat, and the Coast Patrol stayed out of his way. If a wheel were crooked, he would break it over a dealer's head.

A peanut-vendor slipped out of the way and into a saloon. A crillo girl ran into an alley. A seller of cactus candy drove his burro to the far end of the street.

The air, pregnant with fear and the worship of courage, excited Brad Pike. It was the sort of air this chameleon lived on. He wanted action. But he knew there was to be no fight here; and knowing it, his appetite was sharpened. For of all men in Todos Santos, Carter was the one Brad Pike would have liked most of all to shoot down.

If you wanted to get a concession or to open a hotel free from police raids, or to import slot-machines or whisky, Carter was the man to see. His office



There was excitement in her eyes. "You're coming back—right away?"

was in an adobe shack with the sign "Todos Santos National Bottle Works" hung to its wooden awning. Carter had a monopoly on bottled water. You went thirsty or went to pieces drinking hard liquor, unless you paid Carter.

They let Pike go into his office. The guard of honor sprawling on the adobe steps, lit cigars; two cast dice; one went to an open saloon; another dozed.

Carter was at his desk with a palm-leaf fan. "Heard you were in town, Pike. Good old Pike! It's swell to see you again. Drink?" Carter was fattish, ingratiating, pretending to be every white man's lasting pal. He got out cigars and rum. Any visit was a chance for gambling, and if the stakes were big and the cards could be stacked, Carter gambled.

Pike plunged.

"Say, listen, Carter, I'm in a jam: Everybody in town knows why I'm here, and those breeds at the door think they're taking me to the Commandante. I want your help."

"Tell me how I can help you." Carter really meant: "What sort of a proposition are you prepared to make?"

"Tell that squad to beat it. Tell 'em you'll fix it with the Commandante."

"How?"

"Tell him you've got me in a trap, and I've got to come to terms."

Carter lighted his calabash, grinning. "Which means, I take it, that you aren't satisfied with the present market for your firearms."

Pike answered steadily: "No."

CARTER went out and dismissed the squad.

He came back. "Now what?"

"I'll ask you something first: Since it is known I'm supplying arms to fight the Administration, what's this last bond-issue worth?"

"Ten or fifteen."

"Gold?"

"By closing time you can buy 'em with local currency."

"In other words, monkey money."

"Better stick to your gun-running, Pike. Not finance."

"Wait a minute. Suppose you buy every bond you can lay your hands on. Then the center of the postal telegraph system up there in the presidential palace gets the news that I landed a big consignment of guns, but you made a dicker for 'em. What happens? The whole country hears of it. A rebellion is

nipped. Foreign money loosens up, impressed with the Administration. Money can be borrowed to pay off the old loan. The bonds go up to twenty-thirty points. You've got a million dollars' worth of them which you bought for monkey money. You clean up."

"SURE, but—" Carter studied him through pipe-smoke. He got the idea before it was put in words. "I see what you mean. You double-cross these guys who you've promised the guns to."

"I knew you'd get it. There's to be no revolution. You buy my guns and save the country—the Administration, I mean. The Presidente has time then to send a formation down here with bands and such, to meet a lot of unarmed rebels. Not a gun is fired. It's a *coup*. You get a big post as a reward—collector of forced loans, internal revenue, anything you think up."

Carter was already thinking. It was an old game. It had been done before, and it had worked. But there might be a trick somewhere.

"I'll want to see your consignment and check it."

"And I'll want to see your money."

Pike computed the interest on forty thousand for four years, adding it to the principal Carter had filched from old Roan Jackson. "Fifty grand."

Carter raised his brows and nodded as if this, although considerable, was to be expected. "Of course," he conceded, his calabash gurgling, "I could get it in scrip."

"I'm taking gold."

Carter threw up his bloated hands. "Are you crazy!"

Brad Pike finished his drink and got up as if this ended the interview. "I suppose I'll have to lie low, since I'm still subject to arrest?"

Carter knocked out his pipe, thinking. "Where'll you hide—for the rest of the day?"

"I have a room at the American Club."

"I can't meet you there. An old nut from the States is stopping there. Think he can collect a debt."

"Sure. I met him," Pike said casually. "Guy from Texas. Fighting guy. Plain nuts."

"Hang around in back of Morales' saloon. I'll see that the police don't bother you."

In saying this Carter practically admitted that Brad Pike's proposition had much to be said for it.

Pike did not go directly to Morales' saloon. Confident that Carter would keep the police off, he returned to the American Club.

The grinding of winches and banana-conveyors on the block-long pier, the banging exhaust of the banana train as it crossed the savannas and rattled into town, drummed on Brad Pike's nerves, as sounds will upon a man who is suppressed. He went into the comparative quiet of the patio. Roan Jackson and his daughter were on the veranda, the former pacing, rolling brown cigarettes.

"I've seen Carter, and I've got a hunch," Pike looked at the girl. "I can help your dad, Miss Jackson, if you leave him to me. I mean, you better go back to the ship."

"She's going back. That part is sense," Roan Jackson said. "But what else are you telling us?"

The girl jumped up from her rocker. "I'm not going back without you, Dad."

"All your dad has to do is go up to his room and wait till I bring him his money," Pike said. "Getting gold out of this country is a hair-line play. And with a limb in the way, at that. You're the limb."

Roan Jackson pulled down one end of his mustache. His sun-squinted eyes stuck on Pike. He thought he knew men. This one reminded him of many he had dealt with when he was a sheriff in Texas. He looked like a fellow who'd always be riding with the wild bunch, looking not for flowers but for trouble. "Whatever your game is, I don't know," he said. "But I'll take a chance."

"You mean you want Dad to come back here without me!" Hallie said helplessly.

"What's wrong with that? The Customs men told him to go back on the same ship, didn't they? Well, I'm guaranteeing to bring him aboard in time."

"You mean without any fight?"

"I kept him out of one fight today."

"If you promise that—"

She tried to smile, and he saw her swallow hard. She put out her hand.

THE four-o'clock banana train rattled across the savannas, sending up flocks of white birds on the seaward side, red and green birds on the other. Brad Pike watched the string of fruit-laden box-cars slant from the coastal plane into the town and past a street of saloons. He walked down to the railroad yards as the train squeaked to a stop.

Two men came out of a *cantina*, one with bulging glasses, the other with eyes that breathed the divine fire of poetry and patriotism.

"This is the train?" they inquired, in suppressed fervor.

"Not yet. The next one. The train crew's fixed—the engineer, who's an American named Tarkey, and three negro brakemen. They'll see that the freight isn't unloaded. You'll find the gun-cases at the bottom of each car, with half a carload of bananas covering them." He changed the subject: "I'm thirsty."

They went to a saloon and all three ate a spiky fruit with black seeds and milky meat that tasted like ice-cream.

"There'll be a procession of students and stevedores after dark," the poet said. He had another grass-covered bottle, which he opened, filling tumblers.

His companion said: "The procession is in honor of San Pedro Tomas, the patron saint of seamen. We form at the Cathedral, cross the Plaza and march into the track yards. Here we put out our torches. The band will play a hymn. From that moment on, our country is free!"

He put his arm around Pike's hard shoulder. The poet gave him a glass.

PIKE'S mind was inflamed by this close contact with them. It made him remember how, long ago, he had come to Todos Santos in peace; how he had refused to pay a forced loan; how they raised the price of labor, and in the picking season supplied him no labor at all; how they burned a building one day, cut down some of his trees the next. He had killed two men.

It was over now—seven years in Central America. They must have seen the hard twist of his smile.

"You, señor, are avenged for your coffee *finca*!" The poet drank and then turned to the one with spectacles. "And you are avenged for the torture inflicted on your eyes, Señor Rufino."

Rufino and Brad Pike drank to the poet. "You are avenged for what the Presidente did to your sister, Señor Xavier!"

Then Pike crossed the railroad yards to Morales' store. Morales sold stucco saints and rum. Pike took a drink of chocolate at the open bar and passed on into the house itself. From a back window he could see the mule tramways as they passed every half-hour on their jingling journey to the pier-head, and



"My father says the boy is a loughorn. And Dad knows a man when he sees one!"

came back. Roan Jackson, returning from the freighter, sat on the crosswise bench of the open tramcar, alone.

Brad Pike breathed deep and long. With Hallie Jackson safe on board, he could have some fun. But no, he remembered a promise he had made to her. And he remembered a home—a new, strangely beautiful house emerging out of the smoke of his past.

WITH the ebbing of the day's heat, Todos Santos awoke to the evening's grind of phonographs. In a saloon, a marimba hummed its more nerve-tingling melody. Negro stevedores meandered, laughing, one booming out his blues. They stopped at the open bars for molasses rum.

The freighter shook the air with her hoarse whistle; and the banana-conveyors, for the first time in that drowsy day, ceased beating time. The freighter's cargo was aboard. But there was yet one more banana-train coming from the haze of mountains, bumping over the battered rail-ends into the Todos Santos yards.

Carter came about then. His white drill was wilted, blubber stuffing it like a sausage, wet brown in the fatter spots. Without being told, Brad Pike knew he had spent a feverish afternoon, dashing from one "moneda" shop to the other in his last-minute attempt to buy up all the Administration bonds in the town, telegraphing to the mountains, to towns on the Pacific littoral, to the richer *fincas*.

"Where's your consignment?" Carter asked after they had ordered rum and closed the doors.

"Where's your money?"

"Ready to be delivered anywhere you say."

"Send it up to my hotel room. I want to get it aboard the *Orinoco* somehow."

This interested Carter. "I see. If you stayed in the country, you'd be shot, wouldn't you? By these fool students."

No, that was not Pike's reason for going back to the States. But he only said: "I'm sick of eating butter made of maguey worms. I'm through."

Carter filled his calabash and lit up, his red face screwed in thought. "I shall

have to fix it with the Customs. I'll see that they close down—let's say six and six-thirty. There'll be no one on the pier to stop you. And now," he said, puffing, "the guns?"

PIKE took him out to the track yards. Night had fallen. Charcoal-vendors and ox-carts were taking the mountain road for home. Melodies thrummed in the dank evening mists. In the track yards the engineer was tinkering with his motor, but with headlights off. He looked up, astounded. Carter, in accordance with Pike's instructions, had already scrambled up on the last car and was inspecting its freight with a pocket flash.

The three negro brakemen, dining on chili and toasted squash-seeds, unfolded their legs and prowled over to the engine.

"It's all right, men," Pike said in a low voice. "Carter thinks he owns the guns. Let him think it."

"But he's a *legitimista*!" the engineer said, bewildered.

"What if he is? Xavier and Rufino will be here with their mob. The guns belong to them. See that they get them."

"But if Carter brings soldiers—"

"He won't. He's playing a lone hand."

Carter came up, pocketing his flash.

"Satisfied?" Pike asked.

Carter looked at the train-crew suspiciously. "Are these the only men who know?"

"Not another soul in town knows," the engineer said vigorously.

"I'll want the train switched up to the yard-limit post in front of my warehouse," Carter said.

The engineer and brakemen looked at Pike. He said innocently: "Better wait till the town's gone to bed."

"Good idea," Carter admitted. "Those damned students are getting up a parade, and the town will be running wild, fire-crackers for a saint, and parades. I'll stay away from here till midnight."

"Then you won't bump into any trouble," Pike said.

Carter offered his hand. Pike wanted very much to knock him down. He knew well enough that Carter would not let him get out of the country with fifty thousand gold. He would pay it, of course; and then like a *Presidente*, get it back by a tax, a forced loan, or by the simpler method of robbery. Pike's fist was doubled when he held it out, but he opened it and shook Carter's hand. It was a farewell gesture to *Todos Santos* and the old smoky life.

In his room at the American Club he waited until Carter's private secretary and a *mozo* arrived with an alligator-skin satchel. He looked into it, saw the paper-covered bars of gold-pieces, broke one open. He dismissed the carriers, buckled on his gun, then went down the whitewashed hall to Roan Jackson's room.

"Put this stuff in your suitcases and get out."

Old Jackson gaped. "By grab! You're wearing a gun! Is that how you bluffed him?"

"No time for fool questions. Get out. The Customs won't be on the pier between six and half-past. You've got twenty minutes." Both men were lifting the heavy little bars, stuffing them into shirts, shoes, slippers. "You won't have any trouble. If anyone gets stopped, it'll be me."

"If that happens, count on me, son."

"Wait a minute!" Pike said in alarm. "You'll walk straight to that ship. I promised your daughter I'd get you aboard safe."

"I said you can count on me. Feel like palavering about the subject?" Roan Jackson put out his horny hand. Pike shook it, making a wish. The grip told him that he and old Roan Jackson belonged to the same fraternity. If a fight came each could count on the other. And each would enjoy it!

Pike watched the old cowman bow-leg it out of the hotel with two *mozos* packing his luggage. Roan took a tramway, and Pike walked. They got to the pier at about the same time, Pike never letting the old fellow out of his sight.

IT was dark; and the waterfront of *Todos Santos* had no lights except the fireflies and the phosphorescence of the surf. But Roan and his *mozos* reached the small luminous world at the landward end of the pier where the night beetles rattled in clouds about a lone arc-light. A block inland, torches were flaring in the plaza. A band played jazz, then Gregorian hymns. The *Orinoco* whistled a hoarse rumbling warning for all ashore that were going ashore. In the clamor of winches, chains, cranes, old Roan Jackson was a figure in a pantomime, showing his passport to a pajama-clad guard, who spat, pretended to read, handed it back.

Two of the crew carried his suitcases the rest of the way to the gangplank. But old Roan looked back.

Pike's nerves were set like something ready to spring. When he stepped off the shells of the beach onto the wharf, he watched every pile and hogshead and hand-car, every shadow of palm cast by the arc. He sensed the presence of life by movement alone, even when the form of life was hidden. He separated darkness and light with an almost animal skill, discounting the lantern-flies and stinging-ants and fruit-bats.

He ducked simultaneously with the flash of a gun from behind a corrugated-iron shed. The lead slug whistled through his hat. He dropped instinctively, playing possum. Two men came out into the light. Three others lurked, waiting.

"Don't draw, *Americano*. We just want that gold which it is contraband to take out of our country."

Pike had no reason to draw. They would find nothing on him. The gold was being packed up the gangplank a block away, unknown even to its carriers. Old Roan Jackson had his debt paid in full and with interest. He would be safe on board in another moment, with his daughter throwing her arms about his leathery neck.

Pike himself would have the laugh on these hold-up men and then go aboard himself—back to the States, to a home—a special home which he would build, a ranch and alfalfa and cows and clear air.

BUT he forgot it for just one moment. He forgot that the game was won, and that he had kept the promise he had made to Roan Jackson's daughter. The trouble was, Brad Pike had suppressed himself too long.

His gun flicked out and roared brutally through insect-clouded light. The man who had fired at him fell to his knees as if praying. Two others sank in the same macabre worship.

Then old Roan Jackson came crow-hopping, throwing his shots with both hands. Lead screamed out of the palm-clumps. Pebbles at Pike's boots leaped like little jumping beans. Fire screwed through his shoulder. Roan Jackson fell.

But there was silence then, except for the frenzied buzz of insects in smoke. Carter's henchmen were dead or dragging themselves off into waterfront *cantinas*.

Pike knew nothing of how he got on deck. He just found himself sitting on the wheel-box, staring vacuously at a mate who was ripping his shirt. The skipper stood above him, backed by the freighter's whole crew.

"The old gent was hit," Pike breathed fiercely.

"Just a crease, as he calls it."

Pike glared in the direction of the skipper's cabin; where they said Hallie Jackson was sitting by her father's side.

"She'll sure give me hell, that girl!"

"Looks like the authorities will be wanting an explanation," the skipper said. "You fellows bowled over five *cholos*, according to our count."

"There are no authorities," Pike said. "The revolution's started. You've got your clearing-papers, Captain. Why the devil don't you stand off?"

HALLIE JACKSON came out of the cabin, her face angry white. Pike heard the shake in her voice as if it came from beyond the cargo mast, the gulls, the surf and the palms.

"You said you weren't a fighter, didn't you! You lied to me, and you lied to my poor father. I heard just now what you are!"

"Sure. I'm a gun-runner. That's my business." Pike was too tired to pretend any more. Let her have it all.

The crew, circling three deep about him, faded in jet blackness until he could see only the girl who had elbowed her way into the harsh glare of light. Even the skipper's lobster-red face had gone black. But her face was radiant.

"I thought I had it all doped out," Pike said, "how to get the old man aboard, and no fighting. It meant going home—the end of this game. But I'm still in. They'll make me a colonel. No telling how long before Todos Santos is free. It won't be so bad! The guerrilla fighting—that's up my alley. Put me ashore, and I'll get back to it. I'm no good for anything else." He felt her eyes as if the sun were beating on him.

"Sorry I couldn't keep my promise."

He flopped back into the mate's arms—but he heard the girl's voice ask:

"How badly is he hurt?"

"Bad enough to make his talk about going ashore sound pretty foolish," the skipper said. . . .

They were not the mate's arms. They were too soft, clinging bare and hot. His head pillowed itself against her breast.

The skipper added: "We're taking him back to the States."

"My father will be glad to hear that. He says the boy was badly hurt—and he says he is a longhorn. And he must be right, because Dad knows a man when he sees one!"

Junior G-Man

Illustrated by Charles Chickering



A specially attractive story of our old friend Tiny David and the State Police.

THERE was an air of subdued expectancy around the barracks of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, as the afternoon drew to a close. The patrols returned early. The garage sergeant found no occasion to disperse little groups, which usually gathered to argue loud and long concerning the problems of a troubled world. The sessions before the window of the top sergeant, where reports were turned in, were unusually brief.

Long before the hour when the double doors would swing open, thereby starting a stampede for the evening meal, the living-room had attracted a capacity crowd. By virtue of early and continuous occupancy, Lieutenant James Crosby held down a huge armchair which commanded

the radio. Sergeant Henry Linton fought for, and obtained, a place on the settee above which hung a framed photograph of Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the troop.

All the chairs were occupied, and standing room was at a premium, when Lieutenant Edward David, quite unaware that anything unusual was in the air made his appearance. Almost at once three chairs were offered to him. He greeted this unusual politeness with suspicion, but calmly appropriated the most comfortable of the offerings. Then, after he had arranged his somewhat bulky form to his own satisfaction, he unfolded a newspaper and buried his head in it.

Mr. Crosby glanced at the clock, then snapped a switch on the radio. "Wha



By ROBERT R. MILL

is your pleasure, gentlemen?" he asked.

"How about some war news?" asked a rookie.

Mr. Crosby eyed him severely.

"In the first place, we use the word 'sir,' even in the living-room. To continue, there is no war-news. You can hear about behind-the-line troop movements, occasional skirmishes of patrols, and light artillery fire. That isn't war, and it is no longer news."

"Get some music." This suggestion came from Mr. Linton.

Mr. Crosby raised his hand in mock despair.

"There you are. You can't please everybody. Just the same, we must remain neutral. The very best minds tell us we must remain neutral. Who am I

to transgress?" He appeared to be deep in thought. "Let me think. H'm—I have it." He twirled the dial of the radio. "Good old Uncle Dudley. Clean and instructive. He can't offend anybody."

There was a rustle of anticipation as the radio came to life. From the loud speaker there emerged a voice filled with wit and assumed enthusiasm:

"Good evening, boys and girls. Here is your Uncle Dudley again. Have you all been good boys and girls? Yes, I know you have. Well, let's get along with our business."

"Must we have this?" asked M David.

"We must," said Mr. Crosby.

"Well, well, well," continued the oil voice. "I see we have several birthday



Little Edward David, away up in the north country, has a birthday today. He is—” There was a short pause. “Ha-ha-ha! Edward’s father forgot to tell me how old he is. But that doesn’t matter. He has been a good boy all year. He eats his vegetables. Yes indeed. He’s grown so much in the last year that his playmates call him Tiny. That’s fine, Edward. But Uncle Dudley isn’t formal. He is going to call you Tiny just like your pals.”

The forced laugh was repeated.

“There is a present for you, Tiny. Look behind the settee in the living-room that stands underneath the picture of Uncle Charley. You’ll like it, Tiny.”

There were subdued snickers and at least one loud guffaw. Mr. David remained buried in his newspaper. Mr. Linton, however, arose to the occasion. He groped beneath the settee and pulled out a package.

“HERE it is,” he declared. “Right below the picture of Unc—” He caught a fleeting glance of Captain Field standing in the doorway. “Right where Uncle Dudley said it would be,” he concluded rather lamely.

The voice from the loud-speaker continued.

“That isn’t all, Tiny. Don’t go away. Uncle Dudley has made you one of his

G-men. You watch for the postman. Any day now, he will bring you a letter. Uncle Dudley is sending you a badge and a copy of the oath we all take.

“We have a great many G-men in your town, Tiny. Some day Uncle Dudley is coming up to see you. We will hold a get-together meeting. That’s a promise.”

The radio voice paused for breath.

“He’s taking time out to kick the studio cat,” Mr. Linton explained.

Then the voice became a trifle less unctuous as its message grew more general:

“By the way, boys and girls, this might be a good time to brush up on the main points of our oath. Do you remember? We all promise to love our country, and to be good Americans. We aren’t afraid of the cop on the beat. No, indeed. He’s our friend. All law-enforcement officers are our friends. We help them whenever we can. We don’t pry into other people’s affairs and make a nuisance of ourselves, but we do keep our eyes open for anything the officers should know. And we can keep a secret, can’t we. Yes, indeed. All good G-men can keep secrets.”

MR. CROSBY snapped the switch on the radio.

“That’s about enough of that. Our little playmate has received his message. But why doesn’t he open his present? Grateful little so-and-so, isn’t he?”

Mr. David looked up from his paper.

“You mustn’t expect too much from me. Make allowances for backward children. My old man was so dumb that he forgot to send my age to Uncle Dudley.”

The opening of the dining-room doors provided an interruption.

Captain Field had the last word:

“You and your old man both better call a blackout on clowning, and get down to work. Some fine morning the whole family will be on relief.”

Mr. David was at peace with the world later in the evening when he returned to the barracks, where he was greeted by the night sergeant.

“The Skipper’s in his office, and he wants to see you.”

Captain Field looked up with a smile as Tiny David entered.

“Been taking care of your work as one of Uncle Dudley’s G-men, I suppose,” the commanding officer suggested.

Tiny David grinned.

“I won’t laugh at that bird any more, Captain. He has something. While I was downtown, I looked up several kids

I know. They all belong to that outfit, and they're all steamed up about it." He made a gesture of apology. "They're passing the word around, and we are going to hold a meeting tomorrow night. Darned good thing. Besides, it will help turn the laugh on Jim."

Captain Field nodded assent.

"Good enough; but get your debts paid by the end of the week. The Immigration people are having their troubles. Sort of an outbreak of border-jumping, from what I gather. They have shipped in patrols from other districts, but they claim that isn't enough. I promised them you would be on hand with a detail Monday afternoon."

"Very good, sir," said Tiny David...

CHIEF PATROL INSPECTOR Thomas Betters, of the United States Immigration Border Patrol, sat at a desk in a border customhouse, when Tiny David reported Monday afternoon.

"How many men have you?" was his greeting.

"Fifteen," Tiny David answered.

"Good. We can use them all, and then some. You see, there seems to be a general rush to crash the border. The refugee problem accounts for part of it. Then, what with the business pick-up because of war orders, the word is getting around again that the streets of the United States are paved with gold. On top of all that, we are getting some really bad actors—I mean agitators and trouble-makers who have been kicked out of Europe. We don't want them. God knows, we have enough of our own."

Betters produced a map of that section of the border.

"Here is the section we hope to cover. It will have to be a darned thin line, considering the few men we have. By the way, would you prefer to have a section of your own, or shall we mix our men in together?"

Tiny David considered a moment.

"Might as well give us a section of our own, if it is all the same to you."

Betters took a pencil and outlined a section of the line.

"Good enough. Here you are. That's your baby. I suggest you get your patrols in place shortly after dark tonight. We will meet here tomorrow afternoon at about this time and check up on the score."

They both looked up as Inspector Hugh Moore, of the Canadian Royal Mounted Police, entered. He was tall,



"That's right. We both are officers."

rather handsome, and the uniform of his organization certainly did not detract from his appearance. His face lighted with a smile of recognition as he saw Tiny David.

"Hello, there. You mixed up in this party?"

"More or less," Tiny David admitted; "but it really is Betters' party."

The Mountie addressed himself to the immigration man.

"We really haven't much to offer. Just dropped in to pass on a bit of information we obtained from an informer. It's very vague, but I thought you might as well have it. This chap tells us there has been considerable activity, and that they probably will try to bring a batch over tonight. He says the entire works in this section are under the direction of some chap even his associates know only as the Chief. Sounds a bit *à la* dime novel to me, but I thought I'd better pass it along for what it is worth."

THE immigration man nodded rather curtly, and Moore turned on his heels. Tiny David followed him outside. Inspector Moore studied the face of the trooper for a full moment, and then asked:

"How do you like this set-up?"

"Not so hot," Tiny David admitted.

"Why?"

Inspector Moore shrugged. "It isn't anything you can put in words." He hesitated again. "Dash it all, we have

worked together so much that we belong to the same family. If I were you, I'd tell my chaps to keep their heads up and their hands clean while they are on this detail."

"I'll do that," Tiny David promised. "Thanks a lot."

Moore waved his hand as he slipped behind the wheel of his car.

"Just payment on account," he called.

SHORTLY before midnight Tiny David made the first inspection of his patrols. The country along this section of the border consisted of fields spotted by occasional stretches of forest. The actual border was an invisible line, and one which often received scant consideration from both Canadian and United States agencies as they worked together.

The trooper made his way through a section of dense forest. He walked with the noiseless, easy tread of the experienced woodsman. The rapidity of his motion belied the apparent awkwardness of his huge form. The inspection was without incident until Tiny David reached the post where Sergeant Linton was standing.

"I have a complaint," Mr. Linton stated.

"That's nothing new," Mr. David answered. "What is it?"

"Are we holding down this section of the line, or aren't we?" Mr. Linton demanded.

"It is supposed to be our line. Why?"

Mr. Linton jerked a thumb in the general direction of Canada.

"Apparently one of those Federal babies hasn't heard about it. He came crashing through here, big as life. I asked him what he was doing, and he said that he was just looking around. That burned me up, but I just told him that he had a nice night for it. Then he disappeared in the general direction of Canada and points north. Probably thought that things were a little dull on his own section of the line, and that he could slip in here and do a little glory-hogging. Say, is this our party, or isn't it?"

"This," said Tiny David, "is the immigration men's party. We are just the hired help, brought in to serve the chicken salad."

"Maybe so," Mr. Linton admitted, "but that doesn't prevent me from saying that I don't like it. I think their chicken salad is made of veal."

"You just serve it," Tiny David advised, "and don't start any war. They have enough of that in Europe."

Tiny David, continuing his inspection, reached the far end of his patrol. The night had been uneventful. He relaxed a bit as he began the return trip, pausing to chat with the various troopers he encountered.

He was on the fringe of a stretch of woodland when he halted suddenly, his attention attracted by sounds coming from among the trees. Then he heard a muffled voice, speaking in French. He slipped into the shadows, and made his way quietly through the forest. The noise was louder now. A number of men were making their way toward the southern end of the woods, which was over the line, and in the United States. The trooper veered sharply to intercept them.

He was unobserved when he emerged a short distance from the party. There were four men. Three of them walked together. A fourth man followed at a short distance. One glance at the three men convinced Tiny David that they were aliens.

The trooper stepped forward, revolver in hand.

"Halt!" he ordered. He repeated the command in French.

The three men paused uncertainly. The fourth man, who up to this time had been an indistinguishable shape, came forward quickly. Tiny David, turning to face him, saw the uniform of the Immigration Service.

"What's the trouble, Trooper?" the Federal man asked.

Tiny David struggled to control his anger.

"No trouble," he declared. "I don't suppose you want any help with them."

The man in the Federal uniform was silent.

"I understand," Tiny David said. "When I was younger, I used to go in for glory-hogging."

The Federal man growled an indistinguishable reply. Then he gave a sharp command to his captives. The party moved on. Tiny David stood watching them until they were out of sight. There was a sarcastic smile on his face.

INSPECTOR MOORE and Inspector Betters were in conference at the customhouse when Tiny David reported the following afternoon.

"Hello, there," was the greeting of the Canadian officer. "I was just explaining to Inspector Betters that once more I am the bearer of tardy information. Accord-

The trooper landed on the fugitive. There was a short but desperate struggle.



ing to my informant, three very bad boys left Montreal yesterday morning. They had a hide-out on our side of the line, and they remained there all day. Last night they came across. It was an extra special job, and I rather fancy they paid a good stiff price to the ring. My informant even says that this chap the Chief handled the job personally. By the way, did you lads have any luck last night?"

Tiny David shrugged. "My men didn't even catch cold," he declared.

Inspector Better's scowled. "Luck wasn't running our way either," the Federal man declared. "To quote from the war bulletins, everything was very quiet on our front."

Tiny David started to speak, but caught himself just in time. The Mounty looked from one man to the other, but made no comment. In a moment he stood up and walked to the door.

"Well, I'll be getting along. The next time I hope I can bring you some information that's up to date."

Tiny David sat staring at the floor. Ugly suspicions were flashing through his mind. He had known Better's for many years, and knew him to be honest, although the Federal man was jealous of his own branch of the service, and inclined to be hard to work with. The trooper also knew the majority of the men directly under Better's' command, and knew them to be beyond suspicion. The Federal force, however, had been augmented by men from outside the

district. The Federal man the trooper had seen with the three aliens obviously was a stranger. It was equally obvious that he was dishonest, for Better's had just said no arrests had been made during the night.

The State police officer wrestled mentally with the problem. His first impulse was to tell Better's exactly what had happened. Upon second thought, he refrained. It is not a pleasant task to tell an officer that a man under his command is dishonest. Also, it is inadvisable to make this charge unless there is indisputable proof.

LIEUTENANT DAVID reached a decision. He stood up, walked from the room, and entered his car, which was parked outside. Three miles away was a little settlement known as Linetown. Its inhabitants engaged in many activities, some of them legal and others not. One of those inhabitants was a man Tiny David knew and trusted. If what he suspected was going on, it must have been in progress for some time, and it was equally certain that this man would have heard of it.

Linetown was dozing in the sun of a late autumn afternoon when Lieutenant David arrived. The handful of cabins apparently was deserted, as far as all outward signs of life were concerned. But when the trooper rounded the corner of one house, he was confronted by a small boy, who was sitting in a wheel-chair, and whose feet were encased in steel



"I am making you an honorary member of the Black Horse Troop."

braces. Beside the boy was a pair of crutches.

The youngster's face lighted with recognition as he saw the trooper.

"Hello," said Tiny David. "Do you happen to know where I can find Joe Gabor?"

The boy shook his head. "Joe isn't here. He went out on a lumbering job about two weeks ago. I don't know just where he is working." His face lighted with animation. "You don't know me, do you?"

"No," Tiny David admitted. "Who are you?"

"I am Steve Martin. You know, one of Uncle Dudley's G-men. The fellows told me about the meeting you had the other night. I tried to get in, but there was nobody to take me." His face clouded. "You see, it's rather hard for me to get around."

Tiny David's face reflected his sympathy.

"That's tough," he said. "But don't you worry. We're going to hold more

meetings. You're going to get to the next one, because I'm coming out here for you myself."

Young Steve's face lighted with anticipation.

"Gee, that's swell! Won't it burn the other guys up when I show up there in your car! You know, I try to be a good G-man. It's a little hard, on account of these legs, but I do the best I can. I live up to the oath, all right. I don't go around telling things that I shouldn't."

The boy glanced about him cautiously, and then lowered his voice.

"There's a secret right here. I wouldn't tell it, only on account of you being a trooper and me being a G-man, so we both are officers together."

Tiny David checked the impulse to smile.

"That's right," he said. "We both are officers. We can tell each other secrets. What is it that you know?"

"Well," the boy began, "there is a guy right here that is an officer, but nobody except me knows it."

"What do you mean?" Tiny David asked.

"This guy goes to work every day," Steve continued, "and the folks here all think he just works at a gasoline station. But I know better. About a week ago I couldn't sleep on account of these legs hurting me. I was in bed looking out the window, and I seen this guy go out. It must have been along toward morning, but it was still dark. He was wearing his uniform. I could see it in the moonlight, and it was one of those suits like the Federal men wear when they hunt guys who try to sneak into this country from Canada. He was gone quite a long time, but he got back before it was light. 'Bout an hour later he came out again, and this time he was wearing his regular suit, because he was on his way to work."

The boy's voice throbbed with excitement.

"I'll bet he's one of those under-cover men. He's right on the job, because I have watched him three or four other nights. But I wouldn't do anything to queer him. I haven't told nobody except you."

Lieutenant David concealed his excitement.

"Did you see him go out last night?"

"Yes," the boy replied. "He went out early last night. I didn't see when he got back. Guess I must have dropped off to sleep."

"What is his name?" Tiny David asked.

"They call him Marty Halzone. He aint lived here very long. The folks here say he came to take the job up in the filling station, and they were sort of sore because one of the fellows here all the time didn't get it."

"Which is his house?" Tiny David asked.

The boy jerked a thumb at a cabin near by.

THAT'S it. He lives there all alone. He's home now. I just seen him get back from work about half an hour ago."

"Good work!" Tiny David approved. "You did exactly right in not telling anybody else. I'm going in and see this man now. We may be working on the same job." An afterthought came to him. "We may talk some time, but if I'm not back here in an hour or so, will you send word to the State Police barracks, and tell them where I am?"

"You bet I will," the boy replied.

A path strewn with pine-needles led Tiny David to the door of the cabin. He knocked briskly. There was no response. He repeated the summons.

"Who's there?" came from within the building.

"Open up!" Lieutenant David ordered.

There was the sound of footsteps coming nearer. A bolt clanked in its socket. A chain rattled. The door edged open a few inches.

The trooper moved forward, and attempted to thrust his foot into the opening, but the man inside was too quick. The door swung shut. Tiny David threw his weight against it. Too late—the bolt had shot into place.

BLIND instinct caused Tiny David to lean away from the door—and he was just in time: There was the muffled report of a gun, and a bullet crashed through the woodwork of the door.

The State police officer stood poised on his toes, gun in hand, and ready for action. The sound of crashing glass came from the rear of the cabin. Tiny David leaped from the porch, and raced in that direction.

The fugitive had knocked out a window. Then he had leaped to the ground. Now he was in full flight, headed for the woods not far away. Directly in his path sat the boy in the wheel-chair.

Lieutenant David shouted an order to halt, which was ignored. The trooper dropped to one knee, and prepared to shoot, but the crippled boy was directly in the line of fire. The fugitive turned hastily, and fired over his shoulder. Tiny David dropped flat—and bullets scattered dirt near one shoulder. Then he was on his feet, racing after the fugitive.

It was a stern chase. It bade fair to be a long one, and not far ahead were the concealing woods. Then the fugitive drew abreast of young Steve Martin.

The crippled boy had one crutch in his hand. He waited until the man was almost in front of him. Then he hurled the crutch at the runner's feet. The man tripped, tried to regain his balance, then fell flat.

Tiny David, who had been gaining ground, was pulling up on him fast. There was only one way to stop him. The trooper left his feet in a football tackle, and landed on the fugitive.

There was a struggle, short but desperate. That struggle was near the end when Tiny David looked up to see the wheel-chair, which Steve had pulled be-

side them. The second crutch was in the boy's hands, held like a club. His teeth were clenched.

"Shall I let him have it?" the boy asked.

Tiny David secured a firm grip on his foe. A smile passed over his dirt-stained face.

"No, Steve. I have him now."

THE boy's face mirrored his anxiety. "He knew you were a cop. I heard him shoot at you. Then I seen him try to run away. No right guy would do that. I aint done wrong, have I?"

Lieutenant David struggled to his feet, pulling his prisoner after him.

"No, Steve. You did a swell job."

The boy struggled with his excitement. "But who—what is he?"

Tiny David's smile was grim.

"He's a fellow who used a Federal uniform to help him run aliens. He fooled me last night. He also managed to cast discredit on the Federal men all along the border. You made a swell haul, Steve. He may call himself Marty Halzone, but I have a hunch he's a bird we've been looking for, who is known as the Chief."

There was a gala scene in the living-room of the barracks one week later. Cables led across the floor to portable microphones. Not only was the room filled to capacity, but an overflow crowd thronged the hall and dining-room.

A man holding a watch used his lips to frame the words:

"You're on the air."

A short, stout, moon-faced little man addressed the microphone:

"Good evening, boys and girls. Here is your Uncle Dudley again. And is your Uncle Dudley proud! He's speaking to you from the barracks of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, away up in the north country. Uncle Dudley isn't going to tell you why he is proud. Captain Charles Field, the boss of the Black Horse Troop, will do that."

Captain Field spoke into the microphone. He began a laconic, matter-of-fact recital of the part Steve Martin had played in the capture of the alien-runner. All this, Captain Field's voice and manner indicated, was a pain in the neck to him. But there was a twinkle in his eyes; and young Steve Martin, looking up at him with worshipful eyes, ap-

parently had learned that Captain Field's bark was much worse than his bite.

The Captain fumbled in a pocket and produced a badge, especially made for the occasion.

"Uncle Dudley claims you as one of his G-men. He is very proud of you, and he has good reason for that. But you belong to us too. I am making you an honorary member of the Black Horse Troop."

Captain Field bent over to pin on the badge. A roar of approval went up from the assembled troopers. Then Captain Field addressed the microphone again:

"Major John Harner, Superintendent of New York State Police, has something to say to you."

Major Harner, trim and debonaire, stood before the boy and the microphone.

"As a matter of routine, we sent Halzone's fingerprints to the Department of Justice, in Washington. They know him under another name, and they want him so badly that they are willing to pay two thousand dollars for him. I have the check here. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to turn this over to you, Steve."

The boy accepted the bit of paper. He sat staring at it with unbelieving eyes.

"Gosh! All I can say is thanks, but that aint half enough."

Then Uncle Dudley was signing off:

"Now you know why Uncle Dudley is proud, boys and girls. He is like Steve Martin. He doesn't know what to say, either. It is just as well, because the boss tells me time is up. Good night, boys and girls."

A FILIPINO boy, waving frantically over a score of heads, tried to indicate that supper was ready. There was no stampede. Everybody stood aside while Tiny David pushed the wheel-chair from the living-room toward the table of honor in the dining-room.

The procession halted directly in front of Mr. Crosby.

"This guy," Tiny David explained to his charge, "wants to join our outfit. How about it?"

Steve Martin, a bit bewildered by all that had happened, hesitated.

"You're right," Tiny David assured him. "We'll have to give it deep thought. You have to be good, to be one of Uncle Dudley's G-men. I'm not at all sure this guy could make the grade."

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—50,000 WORDS,

MURDER IN E-FLAT MAJOR

By FULTON GRANT

*Who wrote "A Battle Is to Fight" and
"A Million for John Destiny"*



Illustrated by Percy Leason

A FAMOUS ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR IS STRANGELY MURDERED IN FULL VIEW OF A GALA AUDIENCE . . . AND THE SWIFT-MOVING EVENTS WHICH FOLLOW MAKE A STORY SUCH AS ONLY THE CREATOR OF *JOHN DESTINY* COULD WRITE.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

MURDER IN



A pean of triumph rocked the auditorium. And without warning the conductor slumped to the floor.

E-FLAT MAJOR

IT was high noon, and lunch-counters were bristling with their thousands of elbows. A tall, decently dressed young man in a bulky overcoat was making his way through the sandwich-eating crowd at Spinel's corner drug-store toward the booths in the rear. Not an especially handsome young man, but possessed of a likable face, albeit the jaw was somewhat too square.

One of the booths just to the right of the side entrance was not occupied; indeed, its table was piled with chairs as though to reserve it for the use of some special patron. Still the purposeful young man did not hesitate to lift the chairs down with his own hands and set them on the floor. He was about to slide into one of them, in fact, when a waiter touched him on the shoulder, saying:

"So sorry, sir—this place, it is taken."

The young man shook his head.

"Don't worry. You're saving it for Miss Graybourne, I know. But that's all right. I'm looking for her. We're lunching."

The little waiter stared at him, then shuffled away, shaking his head and muttering, while the young man went into the alcove seat without more ado, and proceeded to read a newspaper.

Presently a young woman in stylish tweeds came in through the crowd and went toward the booth. The young man rose and made a humorous little bow.

"Hello, Cora Sue. Surprise, surprise! I was pretty sure you'd be here, so I waited. Had a time persuading your waiter friends to let me sit in your pew, though. How's tricks?"

From their observation-posts, the waiters were relieved to see the girl's face light with pleasure. She exclaimed with excited surprise:

"Why, John! Why, Johnny Freeward! Whatever in the world are you—"

"I'm celebrating, kind of," replied the young man. "And you've got to be in on it. Like?"

The waiter who had protested the usurpation of the booth now came sidling toward them, his face a smile, his mind, possibly, filled with the prospect of a large tip.

Just a little scene, and of no especial consequence in itself. But in the matter



By
FULTON GRANT

Illustrated by Percy Leason

of the strange tragic business which, later, the newspapers called "the concert-hall murder case," that meeting of two young persons proved to have incalculable importance. . . .

They were quite attractive young persons, those two. John Freeward was the son of the late distinguished Judge Ellison Freeward, and himself a law graduate albeit not yet risen to any noticeable pinnacle of success. And Cora Sue Graybourne, formerly a sob-sister reporter for the *Daily Chronicle*, now held an enviable position as head of the press-relations for Jake Schuldrein, Inc., agent and manager for a hundred musical celebrities, orchestras and virtuosi. Let it be said of Cora Sue that the Dresden-China fragility of her beauty was a deceptive cloak which hid strength of character and pur-

pose. Quite a girl, this Cora Sue, and no wonder young Freeward loved her.

John Freeward was saying:

"You see before you no longer a dreary private in the Great Army of Unemployed, but a busy, stirring youth, full of promise, brimming with the will to succeed, with fire and courage, captain of his soul and master of his fate—"

"Johnny! You mean you've really taken a job? You've quit playing ostrich, and—"

"And kidding myself that I can buck five thousand more or less competent other lawyers in this city all alone. That's right. I have, I am and I did. Tell me you're pleased."

"Oh, I am, Johnny—and just a little amazed. What's the job?"

"Don't laugh now. It's in the D.A.'s office."

"D.A.?"

"District Attorney. The great John Latismier himself wrote me a letter, and I went to see him, ready to spit in his eye—you know how I despise handouts from people who 'worshiped the Judge.' But he said he'd been watching me—said he's had an eye on me ever since Dad died and I came to New York. Said he thought I'd make a good people's prosecutor some day, and he wanted me to have the right chance—do it on my own. Well, I fell for it. Vanity, all vanity, darling. So anyhow, for better or for worse, I'm working. Been with Latismier a week, now, and didn't get the gate. Hence the celebration."

Then he added, as he caught sight of the waiter still grinning at them:

"Let's have lunch, darling. This is my party. Blow yourself to anything up to and not excluding a half-dollar."

BUT Cora Sue was too excited to think of mere food.

"Oh, John," she exclaimed, "it's wonderful! You're—you're a district attorney?"

He grinned. "Not yet. But I might be some day if I play smart and really have the stuff. I'm pleased, I'll admit. It's a chance. . . . There's only one more question to settle, now that the young swain's future is assured. When will you marry me, Cora Sue?"

Her face altered, and she seemed to frown.

"Oh, John," she said slowly, "you know I'm terribly glad for you, but—but can't you see—"

He held up his hand.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't say it, Cora Sue. Let's keep my celebration-party happy. Besides, I've heard it all before. You think I'm a decent young feller with a nice family background and a lot of ability which I've been wasting, but stubborn and sort of a stuffed shirt in the wrong kind of a way. And now you want to wait another ten years or so until you can carve out a nice big womanly career before you think about marriage. Sure, I know. The words may be different, but the music's always the same. Well, I guess I can still take it. You're worth it, only— How about that lunch, darling? Your time's money, even if mine isn't."

A MOMENT of awkward silence fell between them, broken by the little waiter, who chose this opportunity to say:

"Good morning, Miss Graybourne."

Cora Sue was glad of a break in the tension. She said almost too brightly:

"Why, good morning, Ben. . . . Sandwiches, I guess. Turkey for me, and—I think the gentleman likes ham." Then as an afterthought, she added: "And how are you getting along with your music?"

The thin face made a grimace.

"Not so good, miss. When you play all alone, you don't get any place. In an orchestra, now—"

"Yes, but you don't want an orchestra job, so you said."

"The unions, they are not for me, miss," the man said with sudden emphasis. "I do not like unions. But like I tell you before, without a union card, no job. I think I am making a good soda-jerker—a musical soda-jerker, that's me, miss."

He turned away abruptly.

John Freeward grinned. "Musical soda-jerker, eh? You're wonderful, Cora Sue, always finding rough diamonds: chauffeurs with culture, waiters with musical talent. You should go in for social service."

Cora Sue was too absorbed to resent his scoffing.

"He's pathetic, John. He's such a patriotian."

"Patriotian! Another case of nobility on its uppers, eh? And what's his instrument, the ocarina?"

She was still serious.

"He told me he played in the National Orchestra at Rome before he came over—the oboe. But even so, he can't get a job here unless he joins—"

"Oboe!" John was laughing. "You sure can pick 'em, Cora Sue. With that

hair and that classical pan, I'd figure him for a violin at least. But an oboe!" And he began an extempore limerick:

There once was a patrician hobo
Who diligently practiced the oboe,
While a lass with compassion,
In true motherly fashion,
Allowed him to—

Cora Sue stamped her little foot.

"Stop it! Stop being so supercilious and poking fun at him, John Freeward. Maybe he is only a soda-clerk, but he's people—nice people, too. He's educated and a gentleman, which is more than—"

John became contrite at once.

"Kamerad!" he said. "Now don't get mad. I was only ribbing you, and I'm sorry. But you'll admit you have a talent for discovering geniuses in the most improbable places. Last year, remember, it was that old cabby in the Park who composed Latin verses. I think he took you for fifty dollars or so. It isn't any of my business, I know, but these talented waiters are—"

Then he saw how really hurt she was, and shifted quickly,

"Come on, let's forget it. This is a party. What's new at Schuldrein's?"

Cora Sue was not appeased entirely and replied:

"Well, not that you'd care or understand, but Mr. Schuldrein has made musical history for New York. He's signed with the greatest musician in the world to come over and be guest-conductor."

"Who's that—Irving Berlin?"

"No, you precious idiot, Giuseppe Maldochini. He'll conduct the Masterpiece Symphony for a whole season, and I have to help him arrange programs and write all the press notices and—oh, isn't it just thrilling?"

"Why? Who's Maldochini?"

"A conductor, stupid, like Toscanini or Mengelberg or—"

"Orchestral drum-major, eh?"

"And he's also the greatest composer of our time."

"And I never heard of him! I thought Friml—"

"You aren't funny; you're stupid. Everybody knows that Maldochini's 'Retribution of Cain' is the most powerful musical document since César Franck. Took him forty years to write it, and he's never done anything else since. He's been refusing all American offers for years. He isn't a bit commercial, you know. He thinks radio is—"

John could not resist saying:

"Not commercial, eh? Well, if old Schuldrein's got him, I'll bet he gets a thousand uncommercial smackers for every flip of the baton, and—"

"You needn't laugh. I just love him, John. He's so noble and ethereal and remote and—it's a privilege even to be near a man like Maldochini. I know you don't like music, but—"

"You malign me, darling. I'm an old music-lover from way back, but I can't stand highbrow stuff. But if you like Bach for breakfast and Beethoven in bed, it's all right with me, sweetheart. So let's don't fight." He patted her hand and reached for one of the sandwiches which the musical waiter had spirited onto their table.

Cora Sue smiled at him. "You're a bit of a weevil, Johnny," she said, "but you're a dear when you want to be. And just for that, I want you to carry me to the opening concert at Vanderstitt tomorrow night. I've got complimentaries. We'll sit with the press and the notables, and there'll be a supper afterward, for the maestro."

John grinned at Cora Sue's lapse into that Southernism, "carry," but let her babble on.

"And I do so wish you could discover good music for yourself, John. It's so important. And you'll meet Maldochini, too. He's such a lovely person. He's a saint, really—so gentle and—"

John's grin broadened, but he made no gibe.

"I guess I can stand it if you can," he said. "Do I wear my old tails?"

"Please. You're divine in evening clothes. Now call for me at eight. Johnny, and I'll have a cocktail for you. I'll have to hurry, now—rehearsal for the radio crowd." She was standing up, her sandwich hardly touched, but looking at him with a real tenderness.

"I know you detest musical things, John," she said, "and you're a dear to go with me. . . . Maybe one of these days I'll have to up and marry you, just to keep other females away."

And she hurried out of the door.

CHAPTER II

IT was a drizzly evening, and John Freeward was in a dull humor. The dreary routine of his work at the D.A.'s office had begun to drag on him and he was feeling a little like a squirrel in a cage, endlessly turning a wheel and get-

ting nowhere. And when, after wedging himself into his outgrown suit of "tails," and squandering cabfare—which he could ill afford—to Cora Sue's apartment, he found her gone. She had left a note, of course, but that was small satisfaction.

The note was typical. It read:

"I'm awfully sorry, Johnny, but Mr. Schuldrein wanted me to meet one of the big English critics who happens to be here on some war-time newspaper job, and chaperon him to the auditorium. I'll wait for you in the lobby at eight-thirty—Cora Sue."

THE usual silk-and-fur clad crowd thronged the lobby and overflowed to the sidewalk, despite the rain. The coming of a man like Giuseppe Maldochini was enough to insure a gala occasion for society as well as for true music-lovers. John ignored the offer of a vast umbrella which the door attendant thrust at him, and pushed toward the entrance. Just inside, a tall, immaculately dressed gentleman, slightly over middle-age, stood talking with several ladies. As John brushed by, he touched his shoulder, saying civilly:

"Ah, good evening, Freeward. Didn't know you went in for this sort of thing."

John turned and raised his hat.

"Good evening, Mr. Latismer. Fact is, I'm being dragged here by the proverbial wild horses. But I'll recover in time to be on the job in the morning."

The District Attorney's severe face gave a meager smile, and he nodded, then returned to his friends, and John passed on through to the lobby.

Cora Sue was waiting, true to her word, although it was not yet eight-thirty, but she was not alone. A long-limbed, wry-looking gentleman with a monocle and a neatly trimmed black beard, and wearing a badly wrinkled dinner-coat, stood by her smoking a cigarette and chatting.

"Oh, Johnny! I'm so very sorry. Did you get my note? This is Mr. Wengalle—the Peter Wengalle, you know. He writes those terribly witty reviews for the *London Conservative*." And before John could even nod at the man, she went on: "This is John Freeward, Mr. Wengalle. He's a lawyer, and he simply abominates music, but you mustn't mind him."

The men shook hands. Cora Sue glanced at her watch and gave a little bleat of anxiety.

"Oh, it's late, and I promised to see about some photos of La Blanchamps.

Do take Mr. Wengalle up, Johnny. Here are the passes. I'll come and join you later. Forgive me, there's a dear. So nice, Mr. Wengalle. And you aren't to be shocked at John's ignorance—he's such an old dunce."

And she was dashing frantically away.

Wengalle lifted the corners of his beard. "She's a bit of a wonder, isn't she, I say? Charming, though. I gather she's your fiancée. Congratulations. Shall we go up? Believe it or not, I detest these things as much as you do."

John liked the Englishman at once. Peter Wengalle's name was, he knew, a sort of conjure-word among the people of Cora Sue's set on the fringe of the world of music, and it was pleasant to discover that this demigod was human after all.

"Cora Sue's all right," he grinned. "But our engagement is—well, sort of one-sided. For years, she—"

Wengalle nodded understandingly. "One gets the impression that she's been infected with the career bacillus. Not a fatal disease. They recover. I'd say hang onto her. Shall we go and join the immortals?"

In the third-row seats reserved for personages of importance, Wengalle was almost immediately recognized, and found himself surrounded, back-slapped, lionized and pounced upon by a dozen would-be worshipers. He was more than equal to them, however, and brought John into the conversation at once.

"Meet my friend Freeward, gentlemen, and admire him. Possibly the only man among us who detests symphonic music and has the courage to admit it. Ought to respect him, what?"

BUT an early winking of overhead lights sent the others back to their seats, and Wengalle seemed glad enough to open talk with John alone.

"An eventful evening ahead, I'll wager," he said, looking around the audience. "See that ghostly lad in the row ahead—third seat over? Chap looks as though he had a sour pickle in his mouth. That's Bloc—Marcel Bloc, the French composer. He's one of the reasons my old paper cabled me to attend. They're doing an American première of his latest cacophony. Probably we'll have an explosion."

"Explosion?" John was curious.

"Something like that. Bloc goes in for being temperamental. Publicity-getter in an unpleasant way. Fights duels with critics—that kind of thing. Killed poor

André Dubenicq last year. Makes scenes. Takes himself seriously. He'll not miss a chance to shout Maldochini down."

"You mean—"

"Quite. Bloc's a maniac. Besides, he may have cause, eh? This thing of his, *Prière en Forme d'une Symphonie* is mad music, and this Maldochini's neither mad nor a musician."

JOHN found himself rushing to defend Cora Sue's idol. "Why, I thought Maldochini was the greatest—"

"Greatest buffoon in the world, my friend. Knows less about music than a public-school boy. Real musicians hate his tripe."

"But Cora Sue said—"

"Miss Graybourne? Naturally she would. All women love him. His stock-in-trade. But he's a nasty old man, for all that. His mistresses fairly litter the musical capitals. . . . That wouldn't matter if only he were a musician, but he isn't. Just a gallery-god, and a devilishly commercial one, too. He'll retire after this American cruise—made the bluff of holding out for years, but that was only price-juggling. He's washed up in Europe now. Vogue's finished. Can't fool all the people all the time, as your Barnum put it. And the Italian's been doing just that too long. And now since the Blanchamps scandal—"

"Scandal? I thought at least he—"

"Yvonne Blanchamps, you know—the French soprano who sings tonight, later on. Far be it from me to spread such gossip, but she used to be Bloc's girlfriend; then she married an obscure little violinist—God knows why—and then Maldochini moved in. She wouldn't sing here, only for him, of course. Follows him around like a puppy. She's a *numero*, as they say."

John could hardly resist saying:

"I'm amazed. Cora Sue thinks Maldochini is about perfect. Says he's a modern saint."

"Of course. All women go for him, although he's sixty, if he's a day old. Ought to end in Hollywood. Sex appeal—that thing you Americans invented. Can't put your finger on what he's got, but his road to fame is littered with female corpses, figuratively and actually. And he still pulls the audiences in."

"But as a composer, he still must be—"

"Composer! You mean that 'Cain' thing? That's good music—if he wrote it."

"If he wrote it?"

Wengalle lowered his voice:

"Look here, my friend. I'm here on a government job, and I don't have to comply with all the rules of department for critics. Officially I know nothing; but when you've mingled with the so-called musical world as much as I have to, you hear a lot of things. There's something queer about Maldochini's music. Serious musicians claim he hasn't the ability to have written it. Took him forty years at that, mind you. Damned slow, if you ask me. And when he published it, it gave him a job in charge of all the Italian musical projects, too. But what has he done since? Nothing. Only some scraps that any young harmony student might write. Not a trace of the hand that wrote 'Retribution of Cain.' Mind you, I don't say he didn't write that; I only say there's room to doubt. And Maldochini's such a buffoon that doubting's easy. You see—"

A semi-darkness filled the auditorium.

"Hello! There go the lights! Trust a Maldochini to use light-and-shadow effects. Well, we're in for it now. Here's the program. Stupidly bad presentation, if you ask me. See? They're beginning with Bloc's thing—too long for an opener. I've heard it once. Not bad, either—musician's music; don't try to like the first movement."

There was a stirring down in front, and the black-clad musicians were filing to their places on the big platform.

WENGALLE said, winking hugely: "There they are, poor devils! Bet you there's murder in every heart of them. Maldochini may be a Casanova in the boudoir, but he's a damned martinet to his musicians. Ah, there he is! Give yourself a look at the phenomenon."

John looked. The crowded auditorium was ringing with applause as a svelte, dapper little man with a snow-white mane of hair came trippingly as a maiden across the platform floor and took his place at the leader's desk. He was picturesque, to say the least. The perfectly matched and pointed mustaches, and the shag of hair, gave him the look of a small ivory lion. But more than that, the man gave evidence at once that this concert was to be a personal thing—a sort of musical visit between himself and the audience. He turned to face the hall, his back to the players. He bowed low. He kissed his fingers toward one of the boxes, while the big hall shook with cheers and clapping.



"Maldochini! Maldochini! Ayl Ayl Ayl! Maldochini!"

"See what I mean?" said Wengalle. "Bet you he doesn't know who's in that box—just picking at random for an impression."

"Signore—" The Italian's limpid voice rose above the clapping. "*E signorini*—" Then he babbled along in passionate but rather grotesque English of which only a little was easily to be understood—mingling words and tears of emotion, choking, faltering, displaying every known device of histrionics, saying, in gist, that he, an old man far away from his native land, had been overwhelmed to discover that, he had merely changed his home.

They shouted and roared and stamped and beat the seats, while the maestro, with real tears streaming down his face, waited and appeared to be choking with emotion. Then he raised his hand in a gesture of majesty. They stopped cheering. He rapped with his baton to bring his men to attention. And with a gesture which was all but tigerish, he attacked the first chord.

The "*Prière en Forme d'une Symphonie*" was something of a revelation to John Freeward. For the first time in his life he was actually moved by orchestral music. This, he told himself, wasn't really music. But the thing reminded him of the vast, plastic mass of Notre Dame in Paris, where, in his student days, he had stood of evenings, watching the great cathedral bathed under a cobalt moon, its gargoyles silently screaming. There was no mirth in it, only primitive savagery. A reedy oboe screamed a demoniac wail. Lost women of Gomorrah moaned in counterpoint. Innocents were slaughtered, and their anguish was the shrill of the piccolo. Sin jeered; death leered through that amazing display of improbable technicalities, while a felt but scarcely heard tympanum stirred irrepressible desires in him, altering the tempo of his heartbeat, snatching at his nerve fibers.

Suddenly a human voice shouted. A man in the row just in front of John was jumping to his feet and screaming or yelling, flourishing his fists in the air:

"*Voleur! Meutrier! Imbécile!*" It was Bloc, the Frenchman, of course. His voice blared over the fanfare of brass and percussion.

"Sacred fool of a mocker! Bluffer! *Prétentieux!* Who is this barbarian who destroys my work? Throw him out, *foutez-le dehors!* Kill him! Mob him! Spit on him! Out with Maldochini!"

A stream of incomprehensible inventive in French and broken English flowed from the madman. He waved his arms and flourished a heavy cane, roaring and yelling and throwing the entire audience into an astonished confusion.

Wengalle nudged John.

"That does it!" he said. "There's your Frenchman in form. He swears Maldochini is conspiring to defame him by playing his thing too fast. As if that kind of music had a tempo, anyhow! Wouldn't put it past the Italian, though. Good God! Look at that, now."

The Frenchman suddenly seemed possessed of a homicidal mania, and only the restraining hands of several men sitting near him prevented him from hurling his cane across the platform at the conductor, or perhaps leaping to commit mayhem upon Maldochini's person.

BUT the Italian was equal to the fantastic occasion. At the Frenchman's shout, he had turned his head slightly, never losing a beat of his baton, and stared coldly over his shoulder. A cruel smile flickered over the man's aquiline face. His shoulders made a Latin shrug which seemed to say: "Aha! It's that Bloc, eh? Well, that might be expected of the poor fool!"

And then he turned back to his score as though babel had not broken loose behind him at all.

"He's a cool one, that Maldochini, I must say," John whispered.

"Cool? He's brazen. And he loves it. This is his chance to be a hero. Money couldn't buy such publicity, you know. Gad, that Bloc is absolutely frothing, what?"

So he was. They had managed, somehow, to drag him out into the aisle now, and were propelling him, still struggling, toward the rear of the auditorium. His eyes were a sickly white, his face purple. Faces peered, scandalized. Exclamations, protests, arose in susurrus above the music. But the music did not cease. It went on, ironical, like an acoustical grin, while its composer was being dragged by force from the auditorium.

And then, suddenly, it was over. That first movement ended on a rising inflection, as though to ask some profound, unanswerable question. And the silence which followed it was impressive.

CORA SUE was slipping into the seat beside John, and he sensed almost at once that the girl was upset and troubled. She took his arm tightly; even in the dim light, he could see that her lips were white and that she was on the point of tears.

"What's wrong, honey?" he whispered to her. "Don't let that cheap Frenchman get you down; he's—"

She shook her head violently. It was something else that was troubling her.

"Never mind—please, John!" she said. "Please—I'll be all right."

The break between the first and second movements was ended; the maestro, moving his baton like a surgical scalpel, stroked out the subtle whisper of reeds which began the andante of that curious composition.

The power of it was like a spell, now. It plucked John's attention and compelled him, in spite of himself, to listen. The innocent, plaintive song of the oboe etched delicate arabesques. The thing seemed indeed a "prayer" now, and its musical whisper was couched in voices which seemed not to belong to this world at all.

Then the volume and the tempo began increasing. A muttering of drums, like the warning lightning before a storm, began to pulsate and throb through the warp and woof of opposed melodies. The voice of the entire orchestra was speaking like the roar of a universe. A deep, sonorous, inarticulate voice that might have awed Moses from the Burning Bush, rumbled in majesty. Thunder crashed. All-but-visible electricity scorched the air. A pæan of triumphal shouting rocked the auditorium as the *fortissime* grew. Crash! The angels of heaven were marching a holy Crusade. Crash! Blare! Fanfare! The brasses lifted their mighty voices.

And without warning, without the loss of a single beat in his mad stroking of the baton, the conductor suddenly slumped against the music-stand, slowly crumpled, and slid headlong to the platform floor.

The music stopped abruptly. Confusion tangled the orchestra. An instrument, perhaps a violin, clattered to the wooden floor as some of the musicians

rushed to their fallen leader. A great universal gasp filled the audience. Men were trying to lift Maldochini to his feet, but his head sagged ominously.

Skeptic Wengalle said hoarsely:

"Damn! I say that's going too far. Utterly bogus, that act. Playing for sympathy. Doing the martyr. Damned buffoon makes me sick."

But Cora Sue took John's attention away even from the drama on the platform, and he scarcely heard Wengalle's outburst.

She was rigid, trembling. She held her two little fists doubled at her chin, and she was breathing as though each breath were a torture.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, as though to herself. "Oh, dear God! She's killed him. He's dead! That awful woman!"

The full significance of these words did not quite come across to John then. What struck him was that Cora Sue should have been so close to the verge of hysteria; she was usually a very composed girl, and somehow he felt that her trouble had begun not with the collapse of her musical idol Maldochini at all, but in something which had occurred between the moment she had left him in the lobby and when she had crept into her seat. But he only said:

"Easy, honey, easy. He's not dead—only a stroke, probably. The man's not young, you know."

THINGS moved swiftly then. The asbestos fireproof curtain dropped over the platform like the closing of an eyelid, and the excitement and startled whispering of the audience became a murmur of astonishment. In ten years or more of concert-going, that crowd had probably never seen Vanderstitt Hall's platform shut off by a curtain.

Then Cora Sue was getting to her feet, pulling gently away from John.

"Rest-room—going for a smoke—can't stand it. Sorry I'm such a— Wait for me, John."

Just then a man ran onto the platform and began addressing the audience.

"Ladi-es and gentlemen!"

What the devil was the matter with Cora Sue? Never saw her so disconcerted. Better let her alone, though. Only embarrass her, following her out there. So he sat still, as the speaker went on.

"It is with sincere regret," he was saying sonorously, "that the management has decided not to continue this night's performance, owing to the sudden ill-

ness of Signor Maldochini. The same program will be given, however, one week from tonight, and your present ticket-stubs will be—"

The rest was confusion and muddle; for another man, not in evening clothes, scurried out on the platform from the wing and ran up to the speaker, whispering into his ear. The first one seemed to recoil as though shocked. Then he turned to his audience and said:

"Ladi-e-es and gentlemen—it is my most painful duty to inform you that Signor Maldochini has passed away."

Murmurs filled the big hall.

"And I am requested to ask you all to remain in your seats for a short time until the police have been able to make their usual routine examination of the circumstances."

Wengalle's eyes were popping.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. As to John, he sat there open-mouthed. This was bordering on the fantastic. This was like one of those awful trapeze accidents at the circus. This was—

Someone touched his arm.

"Mr. Freeward, sir?" He turned his head. A uniformed usher stood in the aisle, leaning over to him.

"Yes, I'm Freeward. What is it?" Panic was in him. Had Cora Sue—

"If you will come with me, sir. Mr. Latismer is asking for you."

"Latismer! You mean—the District Attorney? You're sure you've got the right man?" But he knew before he spoke that there could be no mistake. Hadn't he seen Latismer? The D.A. was somewhere in the audience.

"Quite certain, sir. He sent me for you particularly. If you will come with me, sir—he's down back there."

This was said with a gesture of the man's hand toward the asbestos curtain. "Down back there" would mean somewhere behind that curtain where a man had died.

John got hurriedly from his seat and followed the usher down the aisle.

CHAPTER III

JOHN LATISMER was talking in a friendly tone; yet there was a steely finality in his words.

"I'm sorry to spoil your evening, Freeward, but I need you. Since I happened to be in the audience, the management sent a call for me. Our office isn't really interested yet, of course, but—"

An unbelievable suspicion overcame John's silence.

"You mean—you mean Maldochini was murdered, sir?"

The D.A.'s angular face was hard.

"A bullet. Probably fired during that last crescendo when it wouldn't be heard. The police are holding Bloc."

"But sir, it's not possible."

Latismer was not interested in a young assistant's speculation.

"The Homicide Bureau will take over, Freeward. I want you to sit in and check their work. Their job, not ours, until there is an indictment, of course, but I want a background report—we'll need it later. Cover it like a newspaper reporter."

"Yes sir."

Latismer gave him a sharp look.

"That doesn't mean you're to play amateur detective, Freeward. All we want is a case for the people. You'll find Lieutenant Quill in the anteroom. Stay by him and watch him work. Report to Mr. Dillion in the morning. He'll be in charge while I'm away."

"You're going away, sir?" John was faintly surprised.

"Florida. Two weeks. Leave early in the morning." Then he added in a less matter-of-fact way: "This is a very good chance for you to show clear common sense, Freeward, and I'm glad to give it to you. You're more fitted for active work like this than for office routine. Ordinarily you wouldn't be in line for it, but being here in the building, naturally—" Then he laid his hand on John's shoulder.

"The Judge, your father, was a great man, John," he said. "And his greatness lay in his simple use of common sense and his understanding of humans. I hope you can—"

A flash of a very old resentment filled the young man.

"Please, Mr. Latismer," he said. "If I'm any good at all, it's because I've got something, not because the Judge had it. I'll do the best I can, sir. And I appreciate—"

Latismer did not precisely smile. That iron mask of his rarely smiled. But he gave John a quizzical look as he put on his hat and gloves.

"Very well, John," he said. "Dillion will expect your report. Good luck."

And as he turned toward the door he added:

"This looks like a simple enough case now, but if anything really irregular

turns up, you can get me by phone at Sarasota. Good night, Freeward."

Then he left.

LIEUTENANT JAMES QUILL was an old war-dog in the department. Gruff, short-spoken, inclined to be irascible, he was an able man, and a sure one, with twenty years of service behind him.

John found the Lieutenant at work in typical fashion. In the big anteroom where the musicians assemble before going onto the platform, he had set a little table; here he sat in his shirt sleeves, perspiring and barking questions at the French composer Marcel Bloc, who stood between two uniformed men, looking frightened, almost dazed.

"So you left your friends, hey?" barked Quill. "So you walked out of the men's room where they took you, hey? You wanted air, huh? And then what? Where'd you go then, Frenchy?"

But he did not wait for an answer. He yelled, shaking his finger at the bewildered man:

"I'll tell you: You went across to the gallery stairs, and you went up there, sneaking into the right-hand boxes—right on top of the platform, that's what. You waited until the drums and things were making a helluva noise, and then you pulled a .22-caliber gun and plugged the maestro where he stood. That's what you did, Frenchy, and damned well I know it."

The frightened Frenchman was beyond the limits of his small command of English.

"*Mais, mais non, monsieur*—but no, eet was not like you say. I do not keel him. I swear it."

"You liel" shouted Quill. "You know damned well you lie."

"*Mais, monsieur!*" The Frenchman made a pathetic try at bristling.

"Don't you *monsoor* me, Frenchy," snarled Quill. "Everybody and his sister heard you get up and yell at Maldochini. You raised hell. You called him out. You threatened him, and they had to drag you out o' the hall. You were mad enough to kill anybody. Besides, you got a bad reputation, Bloc. You killed a couple critics back home. Sure, I know about those duels. You—"

John felt disinclined to interrupt Quill at this heated moment, and waited in the doorway. In the more dimly lighted part of the room stood a number of the musicians, evidently retained for questioning. Four or five policemen

were posted at the three exits. The room had a nervous tension as Quill shouted and roared at the luckless Bloc.

Suddenly John experienced an odd sensation: A face among the musicians touched his memory—a thin, gaunt face, of a man in his forties, possibly a foreigner. There was nothing about him that made him stand out from the other musicians, save a sense of half-recognition that John couldn't account for. He knew none of the players. His acquaintance in the musical world included only friends of Cora Sue's, and a few lesser pianists or singers for whom the Schuldrein Enterprises made concert engagements.

But Quill, evidently not able to make Marcel Bloc give him a confession of murder, was shouting now:

"Take him away! Take him out and charge him with murder. Hold him until I can get down to Headquarters."

And the Frenchman was promptly handcuffed and forced out the door, struggling and protesting.

THE moment seemed favorable, and John presented himself.

"I'm Freeward, D.A.'s office, Lieutenant. I was told—"

"Whassat? D.A. man? What the hell does Latismier think he's doing, sticking his nose in my—" He broke off and gave John a quick, sharp look.

"Name's Freeward, hey? Wouldn't be Judge Freeward's boy?"

"Yes sir, I—"

Quill snorted. "Damned if I ever expected a Freeward to be nestin' with those damned political buzzards! But," he added, "sit down and keep your ears open and your mouth shut, son. Remember, this aint a D.A. case yet. Don't butt in. —MacFarlane, get me that plan of the orchestra seating. And you, Schultz—I want everybody in the hall, see? Get 'em when they go out. Post a man at all the exits. Send 'em home, now. But either they talk now, or we'll book 'em as witnesses, hear? I don't care if it's Mrs. Ritz-Vanderfeller in person." He glared at the officer whom he was instructing as though the man might doubt his determination. Then he barked:

"Now all of you musicians, step up here, one by one. . . . Snappy, now."

They obeyed, but they were obviously unhappy at it, and their answers to his questions were hesitant, vague and faltering. John had a sudden recollection of Wengalle's odd remark about all

of the musicians having murder in their hearts, and he wondered if arresting Bloc wasn't a little previous.

But other thoughts chased speculation from his mind. Cora Sue, for instance. Half an hour had passed since she had left him hurriedly, and plainly upset, saying: "Wait for me, John." He hadn't waited, of course, and that troubled him. She wouldn't like that. Cora Sue clung to enough of her earlier Southern training to enjoy having her cavaliers dancing attendance. Probably she'd be a little hurt. Well, he couldn't help it. A job's a job. He'd straighten that out later.

INTROSPECTION ceased, however, as he grew conscious that the member of the orchestra whose face had seemed familiar a moment before was now talking with Quill. He stared at the fellow. He did know that face. He was sure of it. Italian cast. Still, two Italians wouldn't be likely to have that long, bridgeless nose that came straight from the man's forehead to a sharp aristocratic point, like the noses on Greek statues, or the Sixteenth Century nobles in the old prints. Patrician nose.

"Patrician." That word did it. It recalled his little sally with Cora Sue the previous noon. Oboe-playing waiter. "He's such a patrician," she had said.

The man was answering questions.

"The name, it is Rasp. Ben Rasp. I am playing the oboe in this orchestra because the maestro is one old friend of me from Italy."

The voice was conclusively familiar now, and John could not resist an impulse to break into Quill's inquiry with:

"Excuse me, Lieutenant, but I've got a question to ask that may be useful." Then, and without waiting for consent that he sensed might never come, he demanded of the man:

"So—you play the oboe? And aren't you also a waiter at Spinel's drug-store sandwich bar?"

If John had supposed that such a question would discountenance the man, he was quite wrong. On the contrary, the thin face articulated a grin.

"Sure—yes sir. I remember now you are coming one day with Mees Graybourne, no?"

Quill's mouth closed silently upon any protest he may have had ready, and he seemed to listen attentively.

"But I heard you tell Miss Graybourne you couldn't play in an orchestra. You said you wouldn't join a union—some-

thing like that. And how comes it we find you playing with the biggest orchestra in New York. Isn't that a little—"

The grin broadened.

"But why I should tell Mees Graybourne when she is giving me ten dollars for buying music? If she knows I am playing, then she is no more sorry for Ben. She give no more money."

The baldness and shamelessness of such an admission rather startled John, and he could only say, rather lamely:

"Oh—I see. And how long have you played with the orchestra?"

The man lifted his shoulders.

"Six day—not so long, Mister. Like I am saying, the maestro, he is one friend from the old country. Since many years I do not see him, but one day when he is here now he come by Spinel for a sandwich. He is very sorry for seeing me in those place. He does not like to see Ben Rasp make soda-jerk-a, no. He know I am playing the oboe in the big *Sinfonia Romana*, which is now twenty years. He tell me he have an oboe which is now sick. If I will play, he will make a job for Ben, he fix it. So now I am playing."

"And how about your union card?"

The man shrugged again.

"You like to see him, maybe, my *carta*? I show you."

"Never mind," said John, a little deflated by his failure to uncover a mystery. "But Ben Rasp isn't an Italian name, is it?"

The man's yellowish teeth gleamed.

"In America she is Rasp, but in Italy she is Raspa, Mister."

Quill had relaxed and had been listening with some attention, but now he cut the interview short:

"Okay, Freeward: we aint got all night. You take that wop out and argue outside if you want to, but we got to get on with this business."

He was interrupted there by the opening of a door.

A SMALL, grayish individual entered the room and walked straight to Quill's chair, saying something into the detective's ear that had a remarkable effect on him. The detective shouted:

"Huh? Whassat? You crazy?"

The little man was unperturbed.

"Take it or leave it. That's my report, Quill."

The detective said vehemently: "It aint possible. It don't make sense, Doc."

The calm little man shrugged.

"It's a fact," he said quietly.

Quill seemed to pause, then came to a rapid decision: "All right, the rest of you," he snapped at the musicians. "That's all for tonight. Get out of here, now; but I want all of you at Headquarters tomorrow morning at nine. And don't try to sneak out. I got all your names on a list."

The soda-jerking oboist stepped back with his colleagues, who were already filing out of a rear door.

QUILL got to his feet, motioning John and the little man to follow. He led them into a hallway down to a closed door, where an officer stood guard. The man stepped aside and let them through into what might, so John thought, be a dressing-room. It was not large, but it was equipped with a table, a dressing-stand and several chintz-covered chairs. It had a feminine atmosphere and reeked of face-powder. At one side there was a chaise-longue with an ominous-looking burden lying still upon it, covered over with a blanket.

Quill introduced John to the little man, saying:

"Meet Doc Bankler—coroner's office. Now what in hell are you trying to give us, Doc? You can't tell me Maldochini was already dead when he was shot."

"I can, I will, and I do, Quill," said the other stiffly. "There has been, of course, no complete autopsy, but there is every evidence the heart had already ceased to function when the bullet entered his head."

"But hell's fire, there was a couple thousand people sitting right there and saw him keel over while he was beating time on the platform."

John supplied a comment.

"That's right, sir. I was sitting in the third row, myself—within thirty feet of the platform, I should say, and I'm certain he was alive up to the moment he collapsed."

Quill looked at the Doctor.

"Well?"

"I'm not entering any discussion, Quill. I'm giving my findings. The heart had most certainly stopped before the bullet entered—how long before, I'm not prepared to say."

"But it isn't possible."

"On the contrary, it is quite possible, if the man had taken one of certain poisons, for instance—the poisons which affect heart and nervous systems—"

Quill folded his arms and thrust his head forward like a turtle, as he growled:



"You wanna make out he was a suicide? You wanna play he got murdered twice? I'll be a son—"

"I have made no such statement. My business is with physiological fact, not hypotheses, theories or even evidence. I do not assume he was poisoned, or that he took poison. Nothing of that nature can be determined until a laboratory analysis has been made, if then. I made simple tests for common poisons. They are negative. I make no official statement at all in that regard. But step here a moment, and I'll try to show you—"

He went to the chaise-longue and lifted the drape. The great Maldochini, whom only minutes earlier John had seen on the platform, a living, vital personality—lay limp and lifeless, his snow-white mane tangled and faintly blood-stained, his olive face a trifle pale but still handsome in death, his carefully barbered eyebrows bristling over closed eyes.

Doctor Bankler pointed to a blemish on the right temple.

"There has been very little blood. There is no bluish mark around the wound. Had the man been alive when shot, there would have been a slow oozing of blood, and a wound very different in appearance. I have no intention of upsetting police theories. I merely state facts. Now I—"

Quill nodded and looked crestfallen.

"And me with a clear case, hey? This Frenchman is as good as convicted. All I need is his gun, which is likely hid around here some place. I get a simple case of a nut who gets mad and plugs another nut, and now you gimme a line that when he's shot, he's dead already! Jeepers creepers, I think I'm—"

He never completed his lament. There was scuffling and excited talking outside the door. A woman's shrill angry voice screeched, and the door was flung open.

THE woman who came in was more than all else, a startlingly beautiful one. She had a regal manner, even in what seemed a furious mood. She wore one of those modish silken capes with a pointed hood or cowl thrown back to reveal her flushed but handsome face. She stormed in, and the guard at

the door loomed behind her, crying frantically:

"Lady, lady, you can't go in there. You can't—" But she was already inside, slamming the heavy door almost in his face, but not before John Freeward had noticed two red welts across his cheek such as might have been made by angry fingernails.

What happened then was pure drama.

THE woman stopped short at the door, her eyes staring in anguish at the dead man lying on the chaise-longue as Doctor Bankler's hand still held the withdrawn cover.

Then she screamed—in long, agonizing bursts, pointing to the dead Maldochini as though she had seen some ghostly vision.

Then she hurled herself to the side of the couch, flinging past Dr. Bankler, and all but knocking the little man down in her violence, crying:

"Josef! Ah, mon pauvre Josef!" And she threw her arms around the prostrate body, sobbing hysterically and babbling incoherently in French.

Then suddenly she sat up stiff and rigid, and screamed again.

"Il est mort! He is dead! He is dead!" She stared at the men in the room wildly, as though for a moment she imagined that they had killed the man. Then she flung herself again on the body, covering the dead face with passionate, insensate kisses.

John turned away from the scene. No one likes to contemplate things like that; and even Quill, after a moment of amazed hesitation, took a step toward the woman, saying:

"Now, listen, lady, I know it must be pretty bad, coming in here and seeing him like that. But that's no way to let go. Now, I'm from the police, lady, and I'm trying to find out—"

He had pulled a tiger's tail, however; for the woman leaped to her feet, eyes blazing, and spat at him:

"Imbecile! The police! Bah! What do you know? What can you do?" And she seemed about to throw herself at the surprised detective in a blind fury.

This reaction was not in the rule-books, and Quill's sense of gallantry was something less than his practice at handling hysterical females. So, without undue gentleness, he took her by the shoulders and pushed her back toward the wall.

"Easy, now, lady. This aint no way—"

Perhaps it was a sense of futility, or possibly the consciousness of his muscular hands; but from whatever cause, the woman suddenly gasped and slumped to the floor, half fainting.

The men lifted her up and set her in a chair. The Doctor made professional motions over her and held a flask from his pocket under her nose; but for several unpleasant minutes they could not bring her back to full consciousness, and she lay back in the chair moaning in her own language words which seemed disconnected, yet appeared to be:

"Fille—la fille . . . Elle l'a tué."

Quill looked at John.

"You know that lingo? I'm no Frog."

John nodded. "It isn't very clear, but it seems to be that she's accusing some girl of killing him. However, I wouldn't be sure."

"The hell you say? Now that puts it in a—"

But the woman's eyes fluttered and she began to sit up in the chair, as Quill broke off in his comment, saying:

"That's better. You all right now, lady? I got to ask you some questions. You don't have to answer them, only it'll help a lot if you want to find out who killed the maestro."

The woman seemed to pull herself together with surprising strength.

"It is understood," she said evenly; and Quill began with the usual procedure of identifying her.

JOHN had guessed who she was, of course. Her Frenchness, her evident passion for the dead Maldochini, could scarcely escape association with Wengalle's description of the singer Yvonne Blanchamps. But the more he thought of it, seeing her there under astounding self-control, the more amazed he was. She scarcely seemed a woman likely to have such liaisons, least of all to let the world know of them.

Her story to Quill was quite simple. Her solo, she said, was scheduled for ten-forty-five, but she had left her hotel at ten in order to be composed and relaxed before stepping onto the platform. By an ironical coincidence, it was her own dressing-room which Quill had chosen for Dr. Bankler to examine the body in, after the first examination on the scene of death. She had not known of the maestro's accident until her arrival; and it was not only credible but natural that she should have been deeply shaken by the sight of him there.

All this took some time in the telling, for Quill was persistent in his search for connected detail. However, he said at length:

"All right, lady; now there's one more thing: When you were all upset awhile ago, you made some crack in French about a woman. That meant something, and I want to know what."

The singer shrugged.

"Did I?" she said. "But—how natural for a woman to suspect another woman. Believe me, monsieur, with the maestro it is always the women."

"So you think a woman killed him? What woman?"

"Ah, ça! But Josef Maldochini, he was such a man that always some silly woman is dying of love for him. I do not know which especial woman, no. But I am frank, monsieur. For six years I am—how you say? The *amie*, the friend, of this great man. And always it is some *jeune fille* which is ready to kill him when she discover that it is me which he love. It is as we say in the French, *cherchez la femme*, no? But with so many, I cannot say where you must look, monsieur."

She was very composed now, and it was evident that she would give no more information on that point, so Quill did not press the point. Instead he picked her up on this bit of confession, saying:

"So you admit that Maldochini loved you, eh?"

"But of a verity, monsieur. All the world knows that." She was not precisely brazen; she was all but proud in her statement; and Quill frowned as he asked the next question.

"I thought you were married, Miss Blangshongs. How about it?"

She nodded, saying: "Of course."

"Not divorced?"

"No."

"And your husband—he approved of your—friendship with the maestro?"

She seemed faintly amused. She said:

"For the *artiste*, monsieur, the love and the marriage, is not always one same thing. My husband, he is French. He understands the *mariage de convénance*."

QUILL'S simple code was scandalized, and he said:

"Nice, isn't it? And just where is your husband?"

"How would I know that, monsieur? Six years he is in America, while I am in Italy or in France—anywhere. Some letters come from America. But until last

night at the rehearsal, I have not seen him."

"You mean right here? You saw him here?"

"Naturally, since he plays in the orchestra. And why not? We are the good friends."

"Oh, he plays in the orchestra, does he? What's his name?"

"But it is Basile Ambin—*premier violin*. That is no secret, monsieur."

Quill contemplated that, then shot at her suddenly:

"And this Marcel Bloc, you know him too?"

"For many years," she smiled. "Before I am married with Basile."

"You seem to get around a lot," said Quill with heavy sarcasm, but the Frenchwoman either ignored or did not understand the implication, and replied with a shrug:

"The life, it is for living, monsieur. When one is of the temperament *artiste*—" The lift of her shoulders seemed to say that persons of her world were mere toys of their destiny.

WITH sudden decision Quill got to his feet.

"Okay, modom," he said. "That'll be all for tonight." Then he raised his voice:

"Callahan!"

The guard at the door thrust in his head.

"Take the lady to the door. Tell Harris and Feeny to see her to her hotel."

The singer's face was inscrutable.

"*Merci, monsieur*," she said. "So happy to be of service."

The policeman named Callahan said:

"There's a couple dozen reporters outside, Chief. You want I should—"

"No," snapped Quill. "On your way. Good night, Miss Blangshongs."

The singer left, and Quill got into his coat and vest before he turned to the Doctor, saying:

"Coming, Doc?" The little man nodded and walked toward the door. Quill glared at John.

"Aint you got no place to go, son?" he growled.

John emerged from profound reverie in which the pretty face of Cora Sue Graybourne played a prominent part, and stammered:

"Why—why, yes sir—"

"Then get on your way. I don't want no D.A. man around here when the camera men come. That Latismier gets his

picture taken plenty without some young cub from his office bustin' into print."

John was too disconcerted to reply, and Quill seemed to let it go at that, turning to leave. But in the very doorway, he called over his shoulder:

"And listen, son, you go out the front way—through the auditorium, you hear? This whole place will be lousy with reporters in a couple of minutes."

Then he stalked out, and the door closed.

John was annoyed. Who was this Lieutenant Quill—to push him around? If Quill were as smart as he pretended to be, then he might have paid a little attention when John had found out that this oboist Rasp was working in a drug-store, and had just got a job from Maldochini. Maybe it didn't mean anything, but how could Quill know?

Freeward thrust his hat down on his head and was about to walk out the door when an odd and rather grim thing caught his eye: The body of Giuseppe Maldochini still lay on the couch under its drape, all but concealed—waiting, doubtless, for the police to take it away to the morgue. What called his attention to it was the fact that one of the hands had dropped down from its original position across the chest, and was dangling from under the drape: a grisly sight, an ugly one.

AN unconscious impulse prompted Freeward to step over and throw back the drape, intending to lift the hand and rearrange it again.

But as he touched the dead arm, he found it stiffening. It resisted his mild effort to lift the arm, and his hand slid along the soft broadcloth sleeve. Suddenly his fingers encountered something that scratched faintly in the texture of the cloth. On examination, he found that a small fragment of a broken needle, with a short piece of black thread attached, was buried in the material.

Curiosity inspired him to pluck the thing out of the dead man's sleeve, and to puzzle over its possible meaning for a few seconds, as he held it in his fingers.

"Damned queer that they didn't pick this right out—Quill or whoever examined him at first," he thought reasonably; and he was inwardly amused at the picture of this erstwhile Great Man sewing on his own buttons and breaking his needles, showing masculine clumsiness despite his exquisite manner and those delicate hands of a musician.

The sound of scuffling feet in the outer hall broke into his reverie, however, and on impulse which was partly habit, he thrust the broken bit of steel into his own lapel. That would be Quill and his reporters, he thought. No use getting roared at. And so he hurried out of the door and turned down toward the auditorium entrance.

CORA SUE GRAYBOURNE shared a modest apartment in a good neighborhood with Phyllis Dent, a salty young woman three years her senior. Phyllis was as plain as Cora Sue was attractive; yet she had a dry wit and a hard-headed sense of logic. She had a job as secretary to one of the curators of the Blair Museum, and devoted herself to extra studies in anthropology under her employer's tutelage. Oddly enough, Phyllis used this fact to explain her lack of social success with men.

"When you've handled a few thousand skulls of the *homo sapiens* in the fossil state," she used to say, "you may find mere males tiresome. Also, it's hard to be sparkingly with a man, when you're subconsciously classifying him as a specimen—asthenic or pyknic, you know. Anyhow, I like them better as fossils. Nobody ever heard of a fossil making passes."

On the evening of the concert, Phyllis had retired early and when she heard a key in the front door, followed by Cora Sue's step in the hall, she was mildly astonished, for the hour was only tenthirty. And when Cora Sue did not—as was her habit—come bursting into the room all agog over her newest musical sensation, Phyllis was properly curious and went to investigate.

Cora Sue was sitting on the lounge in their tiny living-room, in tears.

"What's wrong, Sue?" Phyllis asked, and she hurried to be of comfort, adding in her casual way: "Has that young Freeward decamped with a blonde? Don't let it get you down, my dear. He's an absolute pyknic type—"

"Please!" said Cora Sue, and her voice was tragic. "It isn't Johnny. It's—oh, it's just awful!"

"Bad as that, eh? Well, you'd better get that mock-mink off; then you come and tell Auntie Phyl about it. I've got a bosom to cry on," she added, with another attempt at lightness. "A little flat bosoms go today, but serviceable."

Cora Sue made an attempt to smile, but its result was merely pathetic.

"Phyll!" she said; and then: "He's dead—he's dead! It's terrible!"

"Who's dead? Not John Freeward, I hope."

The chestnut curls shook a denial.

"Mr. Maldochini," she got out. "She—she murdered him."

Instead of taking this as tragedy, Phyllis was faintly reassured. Hyperbole, of course. Just a Southern way of saying something unpleasant had happened. She put her arms around her friend and led her back into the bedroom. Presently she tried again:

"Better let's have it, Sue," she said.

"You'll feel better if you tell it. Besides, I couldn't sleep until I know now. What really did happen?"

"Why—why, Mr. Maldochini is dead," Cora Sue said, and: "Oh, I've been such a fool."

Phyllis frowned.

"You don't mean—literally? Literally dead? And if you've been a fool—"

"Oh, please!" Sue pleaded. "Please believe me. He fell down dead right in the—at the concert. And—and I know she killed him, and—"

"Good Lord! Who did kill him, then? What in the world are you trying to say, Sue?"

WITH some effort Cora Sue pulled herself together.

"I'll try to tell you. You see, I had to leave Johnny with Mr. Wengalle before the concert, because Mr. Schuldrein needed special photographs of Miss Blanchamps and the only appointment we could get with the photographer was just before the opening, and—"

"Listen, honey, I want to know about a murder."

"But I'm telling you. I went to Mr. Schuldrein's little office upstairs in the Vanderstitt Building, and Miss Blanchamps and Baron de Siis, the photographer were there. That was about fifteen minutes before the program went on. It didn't take long, and I hurried back downstairs to join Johnny, and I met Mr. Maldochini in the hallway."

"Ah, now it comes out."

"Wait! He was coming down from the rehearsal-rooms, and he stopped and talked to me."

"Why shouldn't he? You made him practically a god."

"Yes, but he was—well, *personal*. I guess I was silly to be flattered, Phyl, but I was. He hardly noticed me before."

"Ah, vanity!"

"But this time he kissed my hand and asked me about my work and—you see, we were standing in an angle of the hall by the stairs, talking for several minutes, and I—I saw a piece of thread or something stuck to his coat-sleeve, so I just picked it off. And I said something very foolish, too. But it didn't mean anything. I said: 'You ought to have a woman around to sew on your buttons, Mr. Maldochini.' That's what I said, because there was a broken piece of needle on the thread, and he took a wrong meaning in it, and—oh, Phyll! It was terrible."

"Well, you're good at keeping it a secret! What *did* happen?"

"He grabbed at me and took my hand and pulled me close to him, and he tried to kiss me. He was all—"

"The old devil! So you gave him the classical slap in his artistic face?"

"I tried to pull away, but he held me. I think he went a little crazy. He kept calling me *madonna mia* and saying things in Italian and pawing me and—I was scared and disgusted, and if she hadn't come just then—"

"She? Who?"

"Miss Blanchamps. She must have been standing there all the time—around the angle of the hall. And she was mad. I don't mean just angry; she acted as though she were out of her mind. It was awful. I was so afraid and so—humiliated. She screeched at me and slapped me and pulled me away, and tore my dress. And then she started for Mr. Maldochini—"

"She seems to have been a real tiger lady."

"Oh, she was. She tried to scratch him, and she did slap him, too, just before I ran."

"So you ran?"

"I had to. Not only because I was afraid, but—I wanted to be alone. I felt so—so soiled and vile. I ran down the hall into one of the empty dressing-rooms. I wanted to fix my hair and dress before I went back to Johnny and Mr. Wengalle."

"BUT what about the murder? You said she murdered him."

"I know she did—later. She had murder in her eyes, Phyl. But Mr. Maldochini must have got her calmed down then, because I heard him walking past the door on his way to join his men; and then when the orchestra started playing, I knew it was all right."

"Well, get to the murder, Sue."

"Wait. I tried to go back to our seats then, but I couldn't because they were playing. I stood at the entrance to the auditorium for a minute. That was when Marcel Bloc went crazy and started making that awful scene. I tried to creep along the side aisle while they were taking him out back, but I thought I'd go out to the ladies' room until the intermission between the first and second movements. That was when I saw Miss Blanchamps again."

"What a ubiquitous lady!"

"She was going into one of those private stalls—you know, the places where rich season-ticket people sit. She didn't see me. She had one of those hooded wraps on, and it covered her eyes and most of her face, but I knew her of course. She just went in there and closed the door. There wasn't anybody in the mezzanine lounge except the two ushers and another man and Mr. Bloc, and they were having their hands full taking him downstairs."

Phyllis was impatient.

"Please get to the point, Sue. If Maldochini was murdered—"

"That was later. I went back to Johnny then, and they started playing the second movement of that *Prière* thing. There's a long *crescendo* at the end, and the orchestra was playing loudly, and—well, Maldochini just collapsed."

"Yes?"

"And I know she shot him from that stall. They're all soundproofed on three sides, and you couldn't hear a shot against the sound of the music."

Phyllis was frowning.

"But you didn't see her?"

"Of course not. But she was there—"

"Then what makes you— Hold on, now, Sue, you can't go screaming the word *murder* about like that. Heaven knows you had a bad time of it, and you're all worked up; but murder—that's a serious charge."

"I know it is, but don't you see? Mr. Wengalle took me home when Johnny didn't come back. He said Mr. Latismer had Johnny paged. That proves there was a murder, or the D.A. wouldn't be interested. And Mr. Wengalle told me a lot about Miss Blanchamps and Mr. Maldochini. They—she was his—"

"So I supposed. And she caught him pawing you and threw a jealous scene. That gives her a possible motive, my dear, but in court it wouldn't prove anything definite, and—"

She was interrupted by the buzzing of the front door-bell. Phyllis remarked with annoyance:

"That'll be John Freeward coming to tell you all about it. I think you'd better not see him, Sue. Wait till tomorrow. You go to bed and I'll answer the bell. One look at me in curlers and face-cream will scare him away, anyhow. Jump into bed, now. I'll find out what really did happen and tell you."

But it was not John Freeward at the door, and it was only seconds after Phyllis had hurried down the hall that Cora Sue heard her give a loud, startled scream. Phyllis Dent was not a girl to scream without justifiable cause.



CHAPTER IV

ONE does not, ordinarily, picture the cop on the corner in the rôle of a family man; yet he very likely enjoys marriage, home and fatherhood in quite the same manner as your butcher, baker or candlestick-maker. Lieutenant Quill, for instance, may have been a grim nemesis of crime and a stern officer in the discipline of his several subordinates in the Homicide Bureau; yet when his day was ended in the service of the People, even he could return to home, fireside and slippers, where his motherly little wife invariably awaited him.

Mrs. Quill's name was Wilhelmina but she was called "Minnie" because the diminutive suited her exactly. On this particular night she was waiting for her husband in the "settin'-room" of their modest little flat, patiently darning his official socks, and thinking good, happy thoughts and watching the hands of her mantel clock as the hours slipped away.

It was twelve minutes past midnight now, and little furrows were growing above Minnie Quill's gentle eyes. Not that she was unduly alarmed by the lateness of the hour. After twenty years of being a policeman's wife, she had grown both philosophical and fatalistic about her husband's hours. Still, there is a fateful feeling about the hour of midnight; and when James J. failed to return before twelve, Minnie always knew he was on another of those "big jobs."

The rattle of keys in the front door,

however, drove the furrows away. The heavy tread of the detective's feet in the hall caused Minnie to relax and to settle back into her chair with a feeling of honest relief as she called out:

"That you, Jim?"

"Uh-huh!" came the answer, and a serene smile spread over Minnie's face.

Quill came in and sat down in the big leather chair which was always reserved for him. It was his habit, when coming home, to remove first his coat, holster, and shoes, and then to shove his feet into the slippers which Minnie always had handy for him. Tonight, however, he merely sat. He had not even removed his overcoat and hat. He just sat, staring at the toes of his shoes.

"Matter, Jim? Bad day?"

The burly detective looked a little boyish, then, and gave her a smile.

"No, Mamma, not bad. Just queer."

"New case?"

"Yup. Murder."

Mrs. Quill was properly shocked.

"*Ts-ts, ts-ts!*" she clucked. "Seems like folks are getting worse and worse. Anybody important?"

"Kinda. Orchestra-leader—an old wop called Maldochini, Mamma. Funny, too, because somebody fixed his wagon right while he was on the platform at Vanderstitt, waving his stick."

Minnie stared. "You mean they shot him, right in front of everybody?"

"They shot him, all right, but maybe that aint what killed him."

"How you mean, Jim?"

"Dunno myself, Mamma. Told you it was a funny case. Doc Bankler, he said the feller didn't die of gunshot. Said it looked like heart-failure."

"Heart-failure? Then it aint a murder?"

"Guess it's murder, all right, though."

"How? You got the man that shot him?"

Quill did not answer that directly. A deep frown darkened his face and he let his head drop down on his chest until his face was almost lost in his turned-up collar. Minnie watched him in silence for several minutes, then she said:

"You're not happy, Jim. Got something on your mind?"

He lifted his head to say,

"Just tired, I guess, Mamma. Guess we're getting old."

"Nonsense, Jim Quill. You got conscience-trouble. Don't try and fool me."

He smiled at that, and replied:

"Maybe it is conscience. Maybe I'm

just a dumb flatty, Mamma. Maybe I aint got the guts to believe what I think I believe. Maybe I'm scared of the newspapers. This aint a city like New York or Boston or Philadelphia, where—" His voice trailed off.

Minnie looked up sharply.

"That aint like you, Jim. I don't believe it, neither." She laid her darning down and came over to him, laying her cool, soft hand on his hair, taking off his hat, rubbing his forehead.

"What's troubling you, Jim?" she asked him point blank.

"Mamma," he said, "always I been a pretty good cop. I try to give folks a square deal—even crooks and murderers. But sometimes things is queer, and a feller don't know what to do."

He again went into pensive silence.

"You're a good man, Jim," said his wife. "Folks trust you. You got a good conscience."

Still he was silent. She went on:

"Conscience is a good thing, too. It's on the cops. It's a kind of personal cop. Keeps peace inside us."

Jim nodded. "I know, Mamma," he said, very heavily.

She sat down now, and picked up her darning.

"Then if you still know that, everything's all right, Jim. Better go to bed. You're tired."

But he did not go to bed then. He fumbled with his watch-fob and toyed with its golden baseball. He fidgeted and squirmed and puffed and wheezed and twisted in his chair. And then, with a sudden resolution, he got out of his seat and stepped to the telephone on the wall out in the hallway. After he had asked for a number, he said:

"Hello, that you, Mack? Quill, here. Gimme somebody down there, will you? Gimme Barcomb. . . . He aint there? Then put Russell on. Hurry it up. I aint got all night."

WHEN a new voice vibrated over the wire, he said crisply:

"That you, Cap? This is Quill. I want you should change the set-up on that Maldochini business. I want you should turn that Frog loose. Yeah, I mean him—Marcel Bloc."

And after a lengthy comment had been made at the other end, he went on:

"That's right, sir, I want to withdraw charges. Sure, he disturbed the peace, but who cares? Let him go. He never killed Maldochini. What's that? The

newspapers? Sure, they'll make a row—and so what? We aint afraid of the newspapers, Cap. Besides, when this thing is cleared up, there maybe aint any murder at all, and we're gonna get it hot from the press boys no matter which. . . . Okay, Cap. Thanks. So long."

Then he hung up and went back to the sitting-room and stood over Minnie Quill's chair, and kissed her gray hair. There were years of love and confidence and mutual respect in that brief kiss.

But the telephone rang sharply then, and he grumbled as he stepped back into the hall.

"Yes. Sure, this is Quill," he growled into the instrument. "Hello, Feeney, what you got on. . . . What? For the love of Mikel! Okay, I'll be right over."

Then he called out to Minnie:

"Mamma," he said, "that Maldochini *didn't* die of heart-disease. Now we got another stiff on our hands."

CLARENCE DILLION, assistant D.A., was the perfect functionary. Once upon a time a member of the staff, speaking of Dillion, had suggested that he might have a "red-tapeworm" in his innards, a sophism more apt than humorous. His meticulous love for detail and triviality was exceeded only by his passion for rule, regulation and formality.

Dillion was talking to John Freeward across Mr. Latismer's desk, for the assistant had not wasted time in establishing himself in the famous prosecutor's sanctum as soon as his chief had departed.

"An absurd, stupid and blundering report, Freeward," he was saying in a voice that suggested a scratchy phonograph record. "It tells nothing which is not available in the newspapers. Not one solid fact in your whole ten pages. Frankly, I am surprised that Mr. Latismer should have entrusted you with such a thing. Apparently you are not fitted for the simple business of writing down factual information. I think—"

John tried to curb that rising temper of his. He said, meekly enough:

"I'm very sorry, sir. I can only say that I did report just what I saw—to the best of my apparently limited ability. For instance, there's Dr. Bankler's preliminary finding that the bullet did not—"

"True, but the *interpretation* seems to be your own. Bankler reported a fact. You drew an inference. Not your business."

"But if the bullet didn't kill him, then why arrest Marcel Bloc?"

Dillion smiled.

"Another fact that seems to have escaped you is that Bloc has been released. How does it happen that a representative of the People's Attorney would not obtain information that—"

"Because Quill practically threw me out, sir. I—"

"Ridiculous. Your position on this staff gives you the authority to be present at an investigator's elbow. We need men who can use their authority. This is not a detective bureau, but a law office—the People's law office. We do not primarily investigate crime. Our only interest in police findings is—"

"Just one minute, Mr. Dillion! If you don't like my report, I'm sorry. I did my best on a new job. But I don't have to stand here and listen to a lot of—"

The telephone on Dillion's desk rang just in time to prevent him from completing his angry outburst. For Dillion, presumably acting upon the principle that any telephone-call is potentially of more importance than the spluttering of a third assistant, turned his back and lifted the receiver. He conversed in monosyllables, coldly, without evident emotion, and he ended upon the phrase:

"You want him? I'll send him down, then."

Whereupon he turned a dull eye upon John once more.

"As I was saying," he resumed, "that report lacks all the essentials. We require less deduction and more follow-through in this office. However, you seem to have made an impression on Lieutenant Quill; at any rate, he wants you at Headquarters immediately. That's all. Don't delay."

John swallowed his resentment and was turning to leave, when Dillion called him back with one last thrust:

"And for your personal information, as well as an addendum to your report, it would have been an excellent thing had you included the fact that the singer Yvonne Blanchamps died last night at about eleven o'clock."

LIEUTENANT QUILL sat at his desk puffing a pipe.

"Sit down, young Freeward," he said. "This is only part official."

John seated himself in a hardwood chair. He was beginning to dislike his work in the service of the People. Quill's next remark was a startling question:

"You got a girl-friend named Gray-bourne, aint you, son?"

"Why—why, yes," John stammered. "She's my—my fiancée."

"Works for this feller Schuldrein? Handles musicians' press-stories? Lives uptown?"

John began to resent this inquest into his private affairs, and his instinctive protective sense for Cora Sue made him say:

"I'm damned if I see why my personal acquaintances are any business of yours."

Quill gave him a sharp look.

"Yeah? Well, maybe they are, at that. That's what I'm trying to find out."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I saw your gal last night. She mentioned you, kind of. And now I'm trying to figure how come this French singer Blangshongs goes and gets herself stabbed right in front of your gal's flat. Maybe you got some ideas, eh, son?"

JOHN was gasping with astonishment and concern.

"You mean she—she was—murdered there?"

"I don't mean nothing else. From what we figure, she came there and rang your girl-friend's doorbell just before somebody handed her a dose of steel that cut her spine practically in two. That was around eleven. My man Feeney called me, but I didn't get there until around twelve."

"But—for heaven's sake, man, you can't think—you can't put a girl like Cora Sue Graybourne—"

"No? Maybe not; but that's where the French dame was killed, and we can prove she was on her way to see your gal when she got it."

"I don't believe it," John said flatly. "There is some mix-up somewhere. Miss Blanchamps barely knew my—Miss Graybourne, and they had nothing personal between them; and to be calling at *that* hour—"

Quill broke in:

"That's all very swell, but suppose you let me tell you about it, son, before you start telling me. You was there with me when that singer handed us the gag about not leaving her hotel before the time she came down to sing? Well, she was a liar by the clock. Think I didn't check a story like that? And you remember I sent a couple men to take her home? Feeney and Harris, I sent—a couple smart boys. They took her to the hotel, all right, and she went to her rooms. But right away she puts in a telephone-call, and then she sneaks out

through the flower-shop and grabs a taxi."

John broke in:

"That's interesting, but I don't see how it applies to Miss Graybourne."

"Then wait till I tell you. Harris is a good dick, and he is right there at the operator's desk when Blangshongs makes that call, so he listens in. Feeney is looking for a smart play, and he is outside when she takes that cab, so he tails her. Feeney is behind her in another cab, only he loses her at Third Avenue, on account there is a fleet of vegetable trucks which ties up his car. But when he gets through, there aint any sign on the street of either the dame or her cab, but he's pretty sure she has got out in that block, so he hangs around. Pretty soon there is a patrol car comes through and stops in front of 2344, and so Feeney naturally takes a look."

John was staring wide-eyed.

"So Feeney is with those cops when they pick up the body, and he identifies Blangshongs right away, and phones me—gets me out of bed, too. Now, there is a jane named Dent who lives with your girl. She's the one who calls the cops, see? Her story is that she hears her bell ring and goes to the door, and finds La Blangshongs lying there in a lot of blood, and lets out a yell. She says your gal was in bed at the time."

"Why—that's terrible," John managed to say; "still, I don't see how it proves—"

QUILL shrugged. "No? Well, my man Harris says the singer's telephone-call was to this Schuldrein."

"So what? He's her manager and her agent."

"Yeah? But she asked him for the address of your girl-friend, Miss Graybourne. Now work on that one: And when she drives up to see her, she gets stabbed right in front of your gal's door."

"But—but why would she want to know Cora Sue's—"

"I can tell you that one, too. Schuldrein was down here all morning, and he told me she wanted to apologize."

"Apologize? To—to Miss Graybourne? You're crazy."

"That's what she told Schuldrein, anyhow, and it struck me as queer she would want to apologize to her press-agent just after her sugar daddy, Maldochini, has been killed—and at nearly midnight."

"But—but it doesn't make any sense! There's a misunderstanding. It's a coincidence."

"Coincidence, my eye! And there aint no misunderstanding about why she wanted to apologize—if she did. Those two dames had a helluva row last night, just before the concert. I suppose you didn't know that, eh, son?"

"A ROW!" John was scornful. "That's absurd. In the first place, I was with Miss Graybourne at that concert; and in the second place, she isn't the kind of a girl to have rows."

"No? Well, maybe you got a nicer name for it when one dame smacks another one in the eye and pulls her hair! And as to her being with you, Schuldrein tells me Miss Graybourne was upstairs in the Vanderstitt Building in his office while the Blangshongs dame was having her picture taken by a snooty photographer."

"Oh!" That "Oh!" was as much a sound of deflation as of surprise, for he recalled suddenly the alarming truth of what Quill was saying. Cora Sue had left him in the lobby. She had mentioned those photographs. She had been away nearly half an hour before she returned to join them in the seats. And she had behaved in a peculiarly strained manner when she came back. Not only that, but her incoherent words when the maestro had fallen to the platform—He said, "Oh! Why—why, yes, she did; that's right."

"Sure it is, and she left Schuldrein's office alone; and when Schuldrein and the Blangshongs came behind her, they found her in a tussle with this same Maldochini, who ups and dies about ten minutes later. So I ask you, son—"

"A—a tussle!"

"Something like that. Schuldrein says the old man had a hold of her, anyhow, and when the Blangshongs saw it, she went haywire and took a swing at both of them, the girl and the old maestro. From what I get, that French dame must have been a holy terror when she was worked up mad. Schuldrein says he had a helluva time to keep her from pulling Maldochini apart after your gal ran off."

John was without speech. To picture the delicate, exquisite, sensitive Cora Sue in a hair-pulling brawl with another woman was an impossibility. He still was unconvinced, and said so.

"What does Cora—Miss Graybourne say about it? Didn't you talk to her?"

"That's just why I got you down here. She wouldn't say a word last night. Besides, that Dent gal which lives with her

—a hard-boiled chicken if ever I saw one, too—she wouldn't let the other one so much as spell her name without we call up her lawyer, a feller named John Free-ward—a big shot in the D.A.'s office."

Quill grinned as he said this last, but John was beyond trifling humor.

"Then why in thunder didn't you?" he demanded.

"Because it sounded like a gag. Everybody who ever has a jam with the cops always knows some big shot somewhere, from the President on down. And also, I wanted to get a line on this Schuldrein before you stuck your oar in, and I figure it could all wait till morning. Anyhow, I did call you now, didn't I? I want you to help me make those gals open up."

John's skepticism was not quite real as he said:

"But what makes you think they have anything to conceal?"

"Maybe they haven't; but one way or another, I got to find out. Now you listen here: there's a special inquest this afternoon at two o'clock, besides which there's the Maldochini inquest right after it. If I have to call them kids down for 'em, they're going to be smeared all over the tabloids. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

John's face was decidedly negative. Quill went on:

"Thus far I been able to keep the newspapers away from the Blangshongs story, but I can't hold out on 'em much longer. It aint only one murder I got; it's two, with Maldochini—"

"But there isn't any connection; and besides Dr. Bankler said that bullet didn't—"

"To hell with Bankler! The maestro's dead, aint he? And we pulled a .22-caliber bullet out of his head. Maybe it was heart-failure that killed him, but bullets is a new kind of heart-failure, son. He died queer. So did Blangshongs die queer. And the one pretty face that I can see in both pictures is your little Graybourne gal. Maybe it don't mean a thing, but I got to find that out. And if those kids are holding out on me, I either got to turn the heat on 'em, or you got to dig out the truth, that's all. So if I was you, I'd get started."

JOHN stood up, realizing the seriousness of it, and remarking:

"It'll be noon by the time I get to Schuldrein's, so—"

"You won't likely find her at her office. She was a plenty scared little kit-

ten last night, and I bet she's right home in bed today. It would be too bad to have the newspaper boys up there with her sick and them taking flashlights—"

John was on his way through the door.

BORN and bred in a land where every woman is a queen and may demand queenly treatment from her men, Cora Sue felt herself treated in a manner which she could only describe as "something scandalous." And this treatment had been at the hands of John Freeward, who for well over three years had been protesting ardent love and aspiring to marriage.

No Southern gentleman, she told herself, would permit any incident short of an act of God to make him fail in his simple social duty of escorting back to her home the damsel he had "carried" to a social function. Or if catastrophe and Divine Will conspired to cause such a lapse, no such gentleman, at least, would have failed in the secondary duty of communicating with the abandoned damsel to assure himself that she had been delivered to her door, properly and in security.

But John was guilty of both infractions. Moreover, it was clearly his fault that "this dreadful thing" had crept in and spawned on Cora Sue's doorstep, so to speak. But her anger began to lag after nearly an hour of it, and the scared young woman underneath began to show through, so that at last John began to approach the real business for which he had come:

"Don't you see?" he was pleading. "Can't you get it through your pretty head that it isn't a matter of whether or not I was a gentleman? Never mind that now. . . . I'll eat dirt and apologize abjectly, if I used bad judgment. But the thing is that this is a *murder*. And you're tangled in it, Cora Sue. And dammit all, in spite of the awful things you think about me, I love you and I'm trying to make you take it seriously. I've been worried stiff ever since Quill told me what did happen last night—"

Phyllis broke in:

"Quill? That will be that heavy-handed gent who nearly had Sue in screaming hysterics last night until I told him once for all that we wouldn't talk with-out a lawyer."

"I guess so. Anyhow, that's what I came for. He knows a lot that you didn't tell him, and he's determined to find out more. And if you'll only stop telling me



what a cad I am and let me know what really happened—"

"Ah, the genteel stool-pigeon? We had the impression that you would be on our side, John," remarked Phyllis with a touch of bitterness.

"But I am. Good Lord, can't either of you understand that Quill is responsible for keeping the story out of the newspapers? And just because he didn't want your names dragged into it! He could have arrested you both and held you as material witnesses. He's not such a bad sort if you—"

"I can't say I go for the type myself," said Phyllis, "But I suppose one can't expect too much of the police department. Just what does he want to know?"

"Everything that happened—before. I mean, what happened to Cora Sue when she—. At Vanderstitt Hall before she came back to her seat."

THE two girls glanced at each other, and it was plain they had agreed between themselves that this was to be kept secret between them. But John startled them both with:

"After all, he's talked with Schuldrein; and Schuldrein was with Yvonne Blanchamps when she— Whatever she did when she saw Cora Sue and Maldochini."

"Oh, oh, but you didn't tell me Mr. Schuldrein was in your audience, Sue," Phyllis observed with a frown. "That puts a different light on it."

Cora Sue was blushing deeply. "I—I didn't know. I didn't see him. Oh, what am I going to do, Phyl?"

John said: "Why not let's have the story? I think I can be trusted to be—well, discreet, if it calls for discretion. Besides, Quill knows enough already to make it pretty obvious that you had a little—er—trouble with the maestro."

She nodded, almost mechanically, and her humiliation was painful to see.

"It was—awful, Johnny. I'm so ashamed, so mortified. I never suspected he was that kind of—"

"Likely not, honey, and don't take it too hard. Wengalle tells me the old boy was a pretty crude number when it came to women. Anyhow, you're among friends. Nobody here is going to think

you intentionally led the man on. The marble idol developed a case of clay feet, that's all. Now let's have the story."

IT was a severe effort for Cora Sue to catalogue the events of that painful twenty minutes to the man whom, despite her superficial annoyance, she really cared for deeply. But she tried hard, and bit by bit the story came out, punctuated with blushes and tears. When she reached the part where she had remarked the piece of thread and broken needle in the conductor's coat-sleeve, John broke into her tale:

"Wait a moment," he said. "Let me get it straight: You actually *saw* a piece of black thread on his sleeve? You *touch*ed it, and it had a broken needle in it?"

"Why—yes, that was when he—"

"Never mind that now," said John in tones of excitement. "You said you pulled it out?"

"I did, and I dropped it when he—"

"Wait a minute." John took out his wallet, and from it an envelope. "Take a look at this—was it by any chance the same needle and thread?"

Cora Sue stared in amazement.

"Why—why, yes, that's it, of course," she said at first; but then she changed her mind. "No, it isn't. It's—almost the same, but the thread is much shorter. The thread that I picked off was nearly three inches long, and this isn't more than an inch. Where in the world did you get it?"

"I found it," John said very slowly, "stuck on Maldochini's sleeve—only, that was after he had been dead half an hour or more."

"Dead!" The word fell heavily. Then she whispered: "But—that's impossible."

John told the exact circumstances of his finding the thing. "I had intended to give it to Quill or somebody—thought they must have overlooked it—but I forgot it." He added, reflectively: "And it doesn't make any sense that a man should have *two* broken needles with thread stuck in his coat. I could understand one, but—"

"It must be the same piece," said materialistic Phyllis. "After all, Sue wasn't in a state of mind to be a good judge."

"No, it isn't. It couldn't be," Cora Sue insisted. "I remember it only too well. I only happened to notice it in the first place because it was *dangling*. And this piece couldn't dangle; it isn't long enough. Also I know I dropped the oth-

er piece onto the floor when Mr. Maldochini—oh, you know what I mean. It *must* be another thread."

"Unless it isn't what we think," said Phyllis. "I mean, unless he didn't break a needle sewing buttons, but somebody else—no, that's absurd, of course."

John had barely listened to them. He had been busy scrutinizing the queer little trophy, holding it in his fingers close to the lamplight and frowning at it. Now he exclaimed:

"Hello! This is a funny one. It isn't really a needle at all. It's a tiny hollow tube of steel, and the thread is stuck to the end of it with glue or wax or something. . . . I think it's wax. Now what the devil can *that* mean?"

But there seemed no answer for his rhetorical question, and the practical-minded Phyllis reminded them that Cora Sue had not yet finished her account of the past evening's misadventures. The thread-enigma, therefore, was shelved while the girl completed her tale.

And it was with grave misgiving that John Freeward left the girls.

STILL with that feeling of grave misgiving, John Freeward entered the big Headquarters building, for he was aware that his talk with the girls had continued for a considerably longer time than Quill would have expected. And his neglect to report the queer bit of possible evidence presented by the needle, worried him also. Quill, he knew, would be annoyed and angry. And so when he was finally admitted into the Lieutenant's presence, it was this belated fact rather than Cora Sue's story which was uppermost in his mind.

"Hello, son," said Quill. "What luck? Did the little lady tell Papa?"

The superficial heartiness of the greeting disconcerted John a little.

"Why, yes," he began. "I guess I can give you all the facts now; only there's one thing I intended to—"

Quill gave John a condescending sort of smile.

"Well, it don't matter much now, does it?" he said.

"Doesn't matter? Why not?"

Quill wrinkled his nose. "So they didn't tell you outside? Well, that's all right too. What I mean is, things has happened since you went up there. We got this case all signed, sealed and delivered. Both cases, it looks like." He rubbed his hands. "My boys aint always so dumb as folks think," he added.

"You've got—you mean—you mean you've found the—the murderer?"

"Sure. That feller Ambin—La Blangshongs' husband, which she said didn't care if she was on the loose. Hell, I had a hunch all the time she was either kiddin' herself or us. Hell, no, he didn't care—he only cared enough to tickle her with ten inches of knife in the back, that's all. Me, I don't blame the poor devil, either."

"Basile—Ambin! But how could—"

"Well, it was luck, mostly," admitted Quill. "We might have figured it out, but it was just a rookie cop on a beat along Third Avenue that picked him up—by mistake, too."

"By mistake?"

"Sort of. Listen: I was plenty suspicious of that dame's crack about marriage-de-convenience or whatever she called it—I mean about her man not giving a damn if she was thick with the maestro, see? So naturally I had him down on the list. And when he didn't show up this morning with the rest of the musicians, I sent a man to his flat in Greenwich Village to pick him up, and we found out he hadn't been there all night. Well, I got it out of the bunch of orchestra players that this Ambin and Maldochini had a row the other day when the old maestro walks into the rehearsal with La Blangshongs on his arm, see? The poor devil must've been nursing his jealousy for years, and when she waves the old boy right in his face, he went off the handle, see?"

"Good God! What a mess!"

"I'll say it was a mess. Those orchestra fellers are plenty close, but they hated Maldochini, and they didn't mind letting that story out. So there I had me a swell motive, coupled with the fact that Ambin was out all night, and I was going to have him picked up or send out a bulletin on him, when that piece of luck broke. Boy, I must of been eating rabbits' feet, what I mean. Because the minute I flashed his name over the wire, I got a call from the station telling me they had him in the jug all night. Now laugh that one off! That rookie cop seen a feller acting suspicious and picked him up, see?"

"Acting suspicious?" John repeated.

QUILL nodded.
"I'll say! He was sitting on the curb, crying and making a helluva row in some Guinea language. He had on soup and fish and, no overcoat, in spite

of how cold it was. And when this rookie dragged him in, he jabbered a lot of junk about somebody being dead or killed or something, and they knew he was nuts. Not only that; he had some blood on his hands too, so they jugged him. Well, he had plenty to identify him as Ambin, including his musician's card. So when I sent that name out, the chief up in that precinct called me right back, and there he is."

"You mean—he confessed?"

Quill frowned.

"No, he didn't. He's off his nut, I tell you. He's bughouse. He don't know his own name. All he does is sit and blubber and talk to himself. But the lab shows that the drops of blood on his hands are *her* blood; besides which, he had a cheap gat and a knife. We don't need a confession with that evidence, son. It's an open-and-shut case now."

JOHN sensed a feeling of relief. At least this would preclude any further troubling of Cora Sue and Phyllis. Still, it was not all clear to him about Basile Ambin and he said so:

"But when did he kill his wife, Quill? And how? I don't see just how he could—"

"That aint so hard to figure," said the detective. "It looks like Ambin was waiting for his wife at her hotel. Maybe he meant to kill her there; I wouldn't know. But she had a couple of my men with her when she arrived; and besides, she went right out again, like we know. Ambin must have seen her go out. It looks like he followed her cab, and my man Feeney didn't notice it. You know Feeney got held up in traffic, which gives Ambin time to slip into that house behind La Blangshongs and catch her on the stairs and then make a get-away across the roof to the house next door, don't it? We can't prove all that, but it could be that way. Anyhow, it was something like that. Maybe the medics can get him quieted down so's he can remember and talk. Anyhow, he's booked for a hospital, he's that screwy."

John nodded.

"But that doesn't prove him guilty of the Maldochini thing—you said it clears up *both* cases."

Quill grinned:

"Well, maybe I spoke out of turn then, son, but it likely does, at that. The motive is there and the intent, also we know he threatened Maldochini when they had that row. If we can ever bring that poor

devil back to sanity again, maybe we'll prove that one too."

"I don't think so," John said, after a moment's thinking. "I have a hunch—well, maybe more than a hunch, too. If only Dr. Bankler hadn't shown that the bullet didn't kill the maestro, I'd say—oh, well, no matter if you think—"

"Spill it, son," Quill broke in. "If you got something, let's have it. Anyhow, you didn't tell me about what your little gal said yet."

"That's just it," said John, and he gave Quill the gist of Cora Sue's story, ending with: "Mind you, she was too upset then to realize what she was saying, but she *felt* that the woman was ready to kill. And then, seeing her go into that box and then Maldochini falling down with a bullet in his head right afterward—well, it does look as though Miss Blanchamps—"

Quill was pondering:

"Yeah, it's just possible that her hunch was okay. If them loges are soundproof, then anybody could fire a .22 pistol without being heard against the orchestra."

But he shook his head almost immediately.

"That's all wet," he said. "Them loges are more than a hundred feet from the platform. It would take some plain and fancy shooting to clip a man with a .22 pistol that far away and in that light. Besides, if that old fool Bankler is right, then—well, anyhow, she's dead now, and we can't hold her for it. Anyhow, I'm glad you told me that. Maybe a lot of things will come out in the inquest."

JOHN steeled himself for the ordeal of giving Quill the broken needle and its bit of thread, now that the rest of the interview was finished, and he began with:

"Now there's just one thing, Quill, and I'm very sorry I happened to—"

But the telephone jangled loudly, and Quill raised his hand to request John to wait as he lifted the receiver.

"Yes?" he roared. "This is Quill; what of it?"

And then he let the instrument clatter from his hand as he turned toward John Freeward with an expression of utter amazement on his rugged face.

"I'll be a son of a—" he gasped. "This feller Ambin is dead. He died right in his cell twenty minutes ago. Gosh, I can't stand it; I'll go nuts!"

"Dead! You mean—" John's own amazement was equal to Quill's. The de-

tective nodded abstractedly as he lifted the instrument back to its cradle.

"Yeah," he said dully. "And Doc Bankler is working on him now. He said it's heart-failure. Hell, there's too damn' much heart-failure around for me! This case gets screwier and screwier."

But John Freeward was hurrying out of the door. . . . If Dillion wanted a fact-report with new and vital information, he was going to get one now.



CHAPTER V

MR. DILLION had behaved in precisely the way John had expected, in the way which was his natural manner, which is to say, caustic, categorical, smug and unpleasant.

"After three hours, Freeward, I am delighted that you have found some free time to devote to a mere job in this office. Would you be good enough to let us know what has required your—ah—invaluable attention for all this time?"

John flushed involuntarily.

"I have been getting material for my report on the Blanchamps case, Mr. Dillion," he said evenly. "And I—"

"I don't recall having instructed you to report on that case," said the assistant D.A. "Your work on the Maldochini case was scarcely able enough to warrant your continuing along those lines. As a matter of fact, I have turned the Blanchamps murder over to Mr. Greffiths. Now you left here at three minutes after ten, presumably to sit in with Lieutenant Quill in some interview on the—"

"Then I might as well destroy these notes, if you don't want them," said John, holding up a handful of papers. "I'm sorry you seem to consider my work so futile."

"Greffiths has already reported," said Dillion. "We are quite aware that Basile Ambin is being held. Furthermore, the entire story was given to the press an hour ago. That case is apparently concluded. You may, however, leave your notes with me and return to your regular duties."

John could not resist the urge to grin. "All right, Mr. Dillion—if you're quite sure the office has all that's necessary. I guess I'm not much of a reporter."

"Quite certain, thank you. Greffiths is preparing the brief for the People against Ambin. Possibly it would be to your advantage to sit in with him."

"But there isn't any case for the people against Ambin, Mr. Dillion," said John. "At least, not any more."

Dillion's round eyes widened.

"Just what do you mean, young man?"

"Only that—well, it looks as if Greffiths has left out one fact from his report."

"What fact?"

"Oh, a mere detail, sir: the fact that Basile Ambin is dead—so he can hardly be tried, can he?"

Dillion's jaw dropped.

"Ambin—is dead! Did you say dead?"

John nodded, and told him the astounding news he had gotten in Quill's office, adding, as he saw that Dillion was for the minute incapable of his usual bristling pettiness:

"So I'd like very much to sit in on the Maldochini inquest, this afternoon, sir. It's bound to be interesting and—er—instructive; and since I'm still pretty green at this sort of thing, I'd like to—"

Dillion nodded abstractedly as he snapped the switch of his communications-box and said in a dull voice:

"Greffiths? Drop that Blanchamps case and come in here directly."

THE inquest into the death of any more or less public figure invariably arouses interest; but in the case of Giuseppe Maldochini, the interest had assumed all but national proportions. For the newspapers had pounced upon the story and "played it up" until the late maestro's name had become confused with those of Beethoven and Casanova in the imaginations of Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public. One result of this was an overcrowding of the room in the Municipal Courts Building where the inquest itself was held. And John Freeward was duly amazed as he saw the overflow at the courtroom door.

However, the inquest began to show signs of flagging before he had spent three weary hours in that stuffy room.

The first hour or so was consumed with a reexamination of several of the orchestra musicians; but beyond the fact that all of them disliked the late conductor and were impatient of his guest-leadership, nothing of consequence was learned. And even this impression was clouded by the testimony of the oboist, Ben Rasp,—the same whom John had rec-

ognized as the "musical waiter" in Spinel's sandwich bar,—who was voluble in asserting that Maldochini had given him his job out of pure loving-kindness.

The second hour was taken up with such dry stuff as the testimony of a ballistics expert who identified the bullet removed from Maldochini's head as one of .22 caliber, and who assured the court that, if fired from a distance of one hundred feet or thereabouts, it could easily prove fatal, having struck a vital spot in the right temple.

NOW, however, came Dr. Bankler, and interest reawakened. The little gray man, having been sworn in and having replied to questions tending to identify him as medical examiner and expert, was brief, laconic, noncommittal.

"It has been shown," said the Coroner, "that the bullet taken from the deceased could have caused the death of the late Maldochini. That is the opinion of a ballistics technician. In your own capacity, Dr. Bankler, do you confirm or deny such an opinion?"

"I deny it," said the Doctor, flatly.

"With what reason?"

"Three reasons: First, the bullet did not penetrate the bone tissue. I myself removed it, so I know. Second, even if it had penetrated, death could not have followed immediately. It might have followed, after concussion and other symptoms, but not in a matter of seconds. Third, I believe the man was already dead, or at least the heart had stopped functioning, before the bullet entered."

A tense silence fell on the court, followed by a buzzing of excitement.

"What could have precipitated such an extraordinary situation as you suggest, Dr. Bankler?"

"Many things. Natural causes such as heart-failure, for one. Poison, for another. Any number of diseases."

"You have an opinion?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"The man was poisoned."

The word produced another murmur which quickly subsided as the next question shot out.

"What sort of poison?"

"I don't know."

A tittering rippled over the room. The Coroner was faintly ironical.

"Isn't it paradoxical that you opine that the man was poisoned, and yet you admit you don't know the poison?"

"Not at all. I know the *class* of poison, but not the name of it. I am not an expert toxicologist, merely a medical examiner."

"Then how did you arrive at this—ah—extraordinary deduction?"

"Simply that my first examination suggested symptoms of poisoning—that is to say, there was nerve-paralysis of an abnormal nature. The bullet-wound did not bleed normally. Muscular tension was present before *rigor mortis*. I tested for strychnine. It was negative. I made other tests, also negative. When the autopsy was made, I referred my suspicions to Dr. Muth, who is a specialist. He confirmed them."

BANKLER was excused, and the chemical analyst of the Coroner's laboratory was called, while the entire room sat in electric tension. Muth proved to be a tall, hirsute man with a vast domelike head and a pronounced German accent. Sworn in, he stared at the crowd through thick lenses, and chewed his under lip.

"Dr. Bankler testifies that you made a special examination of the deceased on his recommendation, and that your findings confirm his suspicion of poisoning. Is this true?"

"Ja, yes," growled the German.

"Are you prepared to name the poison and to state how it may have been administered?"

"Ach, that is not so easy as that already," said Muth. "If I say it is an alkaloid, it has no meanings."

"What is an alkaloid?"

"I cannot give a precise definition. Nobody knows exactly. If I say words, then you do not understand them."

The Coroner was puzzled. So were all in the courtroom.

"The court authorizes you to try, nevertheless."

Dr. Muth made a wry smile, and said:

"In pharmacology the word *alkaloid* is employed to designate nitrogenous basic substances of a cyclic nature which is found in plants. In toxicology it is restricted to substances possessing a physiological action."

"Hm-m-m," said the court, while a snicker ran around the room, "I see."

Dr. Muth's smile suggested that he knew the court did nothing of the kind. But the Coroner extricated himself by asking:

"When you examined the deceased, just what did you find, Doctor?"

Muth frowned heavily.

"In the stomach, we are finding nothing suspicious. From the blood we obtain somethings, but not much. In six cubic centimeters I am finding one hundredth part of one milligram of alkyl halide in combination with alkaloid which is not to be identified for sure. So I say, I know he is poisoned, but I do not know which poison."

This jargon of technical terminology produced two things: laughter and confusion.

"Is there no other language in which you can explain this to the jury?" asked the Coroner when quiet was restored.

"Ach, nein, it is science which has its own language."

"Then can you explain how you know that you found a poison when you cannot tell what poison?"

"Because it is known that most alkaloids combined with alkyl halides to form a quaternary ammonium derivative, are having the effect like curare, which is to paralyze the motor nerves. That is the effect which the Doktor Bankler is describing. I am finding some alkaloid to the quaternary base, but such quantities I am not able to make sure which."

THE Coroner jumped at the word *curare* to pull himself out of an unwhieldy situation. He said:

"Curare? Isn't that one of those legendary poisons which South American savages are supposed to use on poison arrows?"

"Ja, yes."

"But—" The Coroner smiled. "You do not wish to imply that a public figure like Maldochini would be poisoned by a South American Indian?"

Dr. Muth scowled.

"I am not implying; I am telling you. I do not say that it is curare. I am saying that it could *not* be curare; because curare, it cannot kill so quick. I am saying that it is *like* curare, which is another thing entirely."

"There are several poisons like curare?"

"Some—yes, not several. I am saying that most alkaloids to the quaternary base, which is to say the ammonium—"

"I know, I know. The court has recorded your statement, Dr. Muth. But in simple language—"

"There is no simple language, I am just saying. But I will say that if a man is poisoned by such small quantity, then it must be some most powerful poison—like curare."

The room snickered again at the man's show of arrogance and the Coroner's discomfort. Mr. Dillion was seen to lean over and whisper into the Coroner's ear. The Coroner then asked:

"Does such a violent poison exist, in your opinion?"

"Yes."

"Can you name one?"

"But sure. There is curarine, which is obtain from curare by methylation, and which is 266 times as strong as the original. It would do."

"Then why do you not state in the first place—"

"Because I do not believe it is obtainable."

"Why not?"

"Where would it be obtain' in these United States? From a drug-store? *Nein*. It is to be found not in the pharmacopœia. It is forbidden. It is not employed in medicine. Possible only in some special laboratory, maybe, but—"

"Curarine? It is not employed?"

"Not since the laws of 1915, since it is outlaw. One time in the patent medicine they have use it for nerve tonic, but it makes a scandal; it is no good. *Curare*, *curine*, *curarine*—all the same, it is outlaw. Where you can get it I do not know. In Europe, maybe, but not here."

"Then you can name no other poison which is as powerful?"

"I cannot. It is true that science has not yet recorded all alkaloids to the quarternary base. It is possible some new experiment—but *ach*, it is not likely, no." He sat back with a huge shrug.

The Coroner chewed a pencil, ill at ease. Finally he said:

"This is a criminal investigation, Dr. Muth. How is it possible to accuse persons as yet unnamed with the crime of poisoning if we cannot name the poison or describe it?"

"*Ach*, I do not know that. I know only what I say. I am not accusing nobody; I am telling you about experiments *und* analysis. Beyond that I do not go."

And he folded his hands with a show of finality, until the Coroner dismissed him; whereupon he returned to his seat, as the newspaper men scurried to interview him. Presently the gavel fell sharply, and the Coroner dismissed the session, to be resumed the next day.

OVER the death of Giuseppe Maldochini, the national press went wild, so to speak, universally styling it the "Concert Murder Case," and treating it like a

subject for a popular novel, as indeed it was. In New York and Philadelphia editors of the big dailies combined in pointed, scathing and bitter criticism of the neighboring city's organization to protect its citizens from crime.

JOHN FREEWARD was discouraged and disheartened as he went up in the elevator to his modest bachelor apartment that night. It had been a most trying day. He felt thwarted, shunted, futile and frustrated in all his efforts. In his own unspoken thought as he dragged himself down the hall to his door:

"Well, nobody can say I didn't try. Maybe I did forget to bring it up in the first place, but I did try to give it to Quill when I remembered, and he slapped me with that story about poor Ambin; then when I go right back with it, he refuses even to listen to me!"

What he meant was, of course, that same piece of broken needle—if needle it was—and its appended bit of thread which he still carried carefully wrapped in his wallet. For this very morning, after reporting for duty at the office, John had slipped out and had gone straight to Headquarters. Quill had received him grudgingly, and had barely listened to his story.

"So what?" was his reply. "So you found a chunk of needle and thread in his sleeve, and your gal saw it too? Well, I should've found it myself, but I didn't. And what does it mean? Only that the old boy tried to sew on a button and busted his needle. What you want to make out of that, son?"

John opened his mouth to say, "But it isn't a needle, and there were *two* of them—"

But at that instant, it seemed, the Commissioner had just finished reading a criticism, and telephoned to Quill with sharp instructions to drop everything and come to his office at once.

And so Quill heard nothing, cared nothing, wanted nothing, and would stand for nothing that a twenty-five-year-old assistant in the District Attorney's office could tell him; and he went out with a snort and a wheeze, leaving John with his statement unfinished.

At the office, Mr. Dillion had remarked John's prolonged absence and warned him that he would stand for no such infraction of discipline. And John had spent the day typing file-cards, instead of reporting further developments of the Maldochini-Blanchamps-Ambin

case. It was a blow to his vanity, a shock to his ego, and an effective shunt to his ambition.

Now that the dismal day was over, he went home straightway. He had telephoned to Cora Sue with the intention of completing his apologies to her, but instead of hearing the superciliously musical voice of Schuldrein's office operator on the phone, a rough, harsh, masculine voice had snarled:

"Yeah? This is Schuldrein's all right; what you want?"

He had asked for Miss Graybourne, and the voice had grown actually surly; "Who wants her?" it had snarled. "If she was here, which she aint, she don't want to talk to nobody."

And that was a strange kind of reception to be had in the city's leading musical booking-office. Some squirt of an office-boy, John decided. Or was Cora Sue still clinging to unreasoning anger?

He turned the key in his door and walked into his stuffy flat. The telephone was ringing as he entered, and he hastened across the room to answer it.

"I say, is that you, Freeward?" It was a decidedly British voice. "Wengalle here. I'm sitting with Miss Graybourne in a place called Spinelli's or—something like that. It's sort of a chemist's shop. She said you'd know it."

"I know it; what's on your mind?"

"Better dash over here, old man. There seems to be some trouble. I just stepped into it at Schuldrein's and took the fair lady away. We've been trying to locate you for half an hour. Do hurry, will you?"

TRAFFIC lights seemed conspiring to delay John. But after hour-like minutes, the cab reached the drug-store; Cora Sue and Wengalle were there, at the girl's usual table. John strode toward them.

"Johnny!" He could not immediately interpret the tone of her voice. It was not precisely frightened, not tragic, yet obviously strained and eager. Wengalle stood up, saying:

"By Jove, I'm glad I got hold of you, Freeward. Our little friend is devilishly upset. Don't blame her much, either."

"But what has happened? What is it, Cora Sue?"

"Oh, I'm so—so confused and—scared. It's Mr. Schuldrein. He—"

"Schuldrein? What about him?"

"He's gone; he's disappeared. He ran away, and the police came, and—oh, it was awful!"

John appealed to Wengalle.

"Would you mind?" he said. The Englishman took up the theme:

"Mind you, I'm not much good at telling it. Only a casual observer, what? But the fact is just what Miss Graybourne tried to say, Schuldrein's skipped, and the bobbies seem to be after him."

"Bobbies—cops? What in the world?"

"Disconcerting business, I'd say. I just dropped over to see the impresario about a rumor of a new booking-office he's supposed to be opening. Well, he wasn't there, but the police very much were. Place was jammed with 'em. Made me identify myself in a large way. I saw Miss Graybourne having an argument with a rather steamy fellow—detective, I'd say. So I carried her off into purer air, if you know what I mean. Beyond that, it's all a dashed mystery. Upset the child no end, though, so I thought you'd be the one to calm her down."

Little by little the details came out.

IT seemed that Mr. Schuldrein had merely stepped out of the office toward three o'clock without mentioning his destination to his secretary. Several appointments for the afternoon were left incomplete, and the lobby of the Schuldrein offices was overflowing with impatient, indignant members of the musical world. Just before five o'clock, without warning, a squad of policemen arrived, demanded Schuldrein, and proceeded to make a shambles of the office in a search for something unnamed.

What upset Cora Sue especially was that Lieutenant Quill was in charge of the policemen; and seeing her, made it his business to ply her with all manner of questions concerning her employer in a rough, insensitive manner, until Wengalle had arrived, quite by coincidence, and had spirited her out of the place.

"But I don't see," John reflected aloud, "what the cops could want of Jake Schuldrein."

"Perhaps he is absconding with his corporation funds," Wengalle suggested, and Cora Sue flew to her employer's defense, ridiculing such a possibility, as John joined her with:

"No, it couldn't be that—not if Quill was on the scene. He's Homicide, you know. Say, it can't be they suspect Schuldrein in one of those murders now."

Wengalle grinned in his beard.

"From the attitude of the press, I'd say they might suspect anybody from the Mayor to one of the seals in the aquar-

ium. Still, it does seem odd, eh? I say, shall we have a bite of dinner somewhere? Food might be the right ticket for Miss Graybourne, you know."

"Then let's stay right here. They serve sandwiches. Besides, it's Cora Sue's favorite lunch-counter," John urged.

CORA SUE protested a complete lack of appetite but was eventually prevailed upon to have a cup of coffee, and John pushed the button which summoned a waiter to the booth.

The waiter was, as might be expected, Ben Rasp, the oboist. He showed no sign of embarrassment at seeing John and Cora Sue, but brazenly said his "Good evening, mees," quite as though he had not confessed that he had been trading on the girl's sympathies. John resented this, and said, for her benefit:

"By the way, Cora Sue, your friend Ben has gone up in the world. Apparently Maldochini recognized him here one day, and gave him a substitute's job as oboist in the orchestra—or perhaps you saw something about it in the papers?"

"Why, Ben, how lovely! How lucky, too! I'm so very glad!" she said sincerely, not perceiving the irony in John's manner. "So you've overcome your prejudices against unions."

The musical waiter shrugged.

"The master, he was so very kind, mees; but the job, it is now finish—seeence the master have been killed, it is finish now."

"But why? The orchestra will play—I know, because I've seen the bookings."

"I do not know if we will play some more now. We have not the instrument, which the police they are keeping still."

"Instruments? You mean they won't let you have them?"

"No, mees. That night, when the master is die, they are locking everything up. Every day I am going to ask for my oboe, but the cops, they are keeping. So I am not practice any more."

"That's tough," said John. "I suppose they sealed everything that was in the place. They would. But don't you orchestra fellows have duplicates?"

He shrugged again.

"Ma si—but yes, sometimes. But not me. I am paying in Italy five t'ousand lire for one oboe, and t'ree t'ousand for one more oboe. But they have lock both of them. I am not so rich I can buy more, no. . . . Tonight it is the chicken giblets which is special. Maybe you like I bring?"



And when he had gone with his order, Cora Sue exclaimed:

"I think that's a mean shame to keep the only tools of making a living away from musicians, even if there was a murder. You can't kill a man with an oboe, you know."

"Not unless you clout him across the head," admitted John. "As a weapon, I'd take one of those helical basses."

"That's band, not orchestra, stupid."

"Well, then, a trombone has a good heft to it."

Peter Wengalle, who had been silent, broke in with a change of subject.

"I say," he demanded, oddly, "who is that chap? What's this talk of the orchestra?"

JOHN told him Rasp's strange story, not failing to take a gibe at Cora Sue's militant idealism and weakness for the underdog.

"He's a brazen one, too," he added. "I recognized him, of course, when I sat in for the D.A. as the police questioned everybody in the orchestra that night, and he admitted Cora Sue had given him ten bucks to buy music. He said he hadn't mentioned Maldochini's giving him a job, although he had been playing for a week, because she might not make him another hand-out. Cora Sue's a real little friend of the downtrodden—and they see her coming."

Wengalle nodded.

"An expensive hobby, in my experience. But what struck me was the man's face. I'd have sworn I recognized him from somewhere. Queer, what?"

"I don't think it's queer," said the girl. "He did play with the National Symphony at Rome, and you must have seen him in the orchestra dozens of times, Mr. Wengalle."

"Ah? So? Well, that would be it, of course. Odd thing, one's memory. It was his neck that reminded me."

"That Adam's apple! It's his best feature. I hear that playing the oboe raises hob with the larynx or something," said John with some mirth. But the waiter, subject of discussion, was returning to the booth with his tray, so they changed the conversation to things less personal.

As they ate, Cora Sue spoke up suddenly in a hushed voice to John:

"Oh, Johnny, there's something I meant to—oh, well, another time will do, but—"

"What is it, honey? I'm sure Mr. Wengalle won't—"

"Don't mind me, please," said the Englishman. "My musical ear is trained to hear only that which is desirable. Besides, I'm enjoying your American version of a chemist's shop. Nothing synthetic about these giblets, you know."

"Oh, dear, I didn't really mean to—talk about that—that awful night again, Johnny, but I just remembered something I should have remembered when that detective was shouting at me."

"Not another clue?"

"No—it isn't a clue. I mean, not really, but I—"

"Come on, Cora Sue, let's have it, anyhow. Nothing you could say could add anything more to the general confusion."

"Well, it was when I went back—there—and saw Miss Blanchamps going into that box. There was a man in there. He held the door open for her."

"A man? Well, from what we know of La Blanchamps, that isn't surprising. She seems to have known one or two."

"I know, but—I didn't mean only that. You see, I saw him again—yesterday. I wouldn't have remembered the first time if I hadn't seen him again. He—he had something the matter with an eye—it looked like a scar across the ridge above it. And yesterday I saw it plainly."

"Where?"

"Right here, and at noon."

"The devil you did!"

"But I did. He was sitting with another man. They were both foreigners. Italians, I think. And once—oh, this is just silly, of course, but once I thought they were looking at me and talking about me. But they—they went away."

"Probably all a mistake, honey. But even so, there's nothing unusual about a man looking at you—or talking about you, for that matter. You aren't too hard to look at, you know. Besides, Latins aren't quite so reticent as Anglo-Saxons."

"I know, I told you it was just silly."

"Well, if they come again and bother you, just talk to your friend Ben Rasp. He'll put them in their place. He owes you that, at least—for ten dollars."

I've only three days more here, you know, and I still want to hear a swing band in one of your—ah—warm places."

"Hot spots? It's all right with me, but if Cora Sue still feels upset—"

"Oh, I don't. It just shocked me to see Mr. Schuldrein in trouble. But I'd love to show Mr. Wengalle something like that. How about the Jupiter Club? That's Zuchine's band—it's about the best, too."

And presently they were on their way.

AS such evenings go, that was a good one. The Jupiter crowd was as artificially joyous as ever, and the cocktails no worse than usual in night-clubs. Yet aside from the faintly vicarious amusement of seeing England's pithiest reviewer chuckling like a boy playing hookey as Zuchine's band increased in temperature, grew "hot" and finally exploded into a sort of rhythmic insanity, it was much like any other evening in any other night-club.

The hour was not yet late when Cora Sue confessed to being frayed at the nerves and, frankly, tired out. So the party disbanded shortly after midnight; and Wengalle, with a slight alcoholic exuberance, left them at the door, saying:

"Well, cheerio, my love-birds. I'll walk, thanks. Hotel's only a step, anyhow. And say, you'll not betray me, will you? If it ever leaked out that the usually solemn ass Wengalle had unbent so far as to applaud an American swing band, I'd find myself taboo."

In the cab, John ventured to say:

"I'm almost tempted to wish Schuldrein has really got away with the corporation bank-account and then gets caught at it. In that case, you'd be fresh out of careers, and maybe I could interest you in the advantages of home and fireside."

"Please, Johnny, don't say anything like that!" she almost wept in her protest. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to Mr. Schuldrein. He's a dear, and I just couldn't bear it if—"

"If you had another clay-footed idol, eh? Seems to me you loved Maldochini too, and he—"

"Please, Johnny!" she implored him, and he was contrite at once.

"Sorry. I was only taking a clubfooted way of hinting that I'm still planning on your being Mrs. District Attorney Free-ward, one of these days."

She pressed his hand. "I'd be right proud to," she said, and then, with ex-

WENGALLE broke in: "I say," he said, "what about that idea of mine I mentioned at the concert?"

citement: "But are they really making you a-District Attorney?"

"Well, not exactly—yet," he said ruefully. "There's one rather nastily buzzing fly in that ointment named Dillion. He's Latismier's second man, and he doesn't seem to appreciate my talents much."

And he told her, in some part, at least, of his differences with the Assistant District Attorney, while she listened with appropriate throat-noises and little exclamations of loving indignation against Dillion's hypercritical attitude, until John confessed his increasing urge to "do something about" the solution of the as-yet-unsolved case. Cora Sue's loyalty pounced upon that.

"Why, of course you can, Johnny," she assured him. "You know ever so much more about it than anybody else, anyhow. And if that old Quill doesn't think your finding that funny needle-thing isn't important, it just shows how—how stupid the police are, anyhow. Besides, I'm sure it was Miss Blanchamps who—"

"I wouldn't be too sure, honey. They've gone into that angle pretty well, you know. And somebody did kill La Blanchamps and her husband too, so that just about lets them out."

"Are they sure Mr. Ambin was murdered? I thought it was heart-failure."

"They aren't sure of anything, apparently; but as Quill said, there's too much heart-failure for one small group. I'm going to work on that angle. There's some queer kind of connection, I know."

THE cab drew up to the curb in front of Cora Sue's brownstone house; John stopped to pay the driver as the girl scampered up the antiquated stoop to avoid the chill. The street was dark at that point; and a slight flurry of snow, the first of the season, dimmed such light as came from the arc on the corner. John turned from the cab and paused to breathe a full breath of the crisp air. A policeman on the beat was just disappearing around the Third Avenue corner, his uniform snow-tipped. A big sedan's motor was purring in the murk across the street. A radio from some upstairs window was giving out commercial cacophony. The spray of crisp, fine snow made a crackling sound on John's hat as he followed Cora Sue to the door, and their cab growled away.

The girl had not waited outside, for the wind was nippy; and not seeing her,

John concluded wisely that she had sought the refuge of the vestibule within. However he remarked that it was odd that the stoop light should be out. Trouble with these second-rate apartment houses—they're cheap, but you only get the service you pay for.

Stepping through the door, he heard a half-strangled voice which he knew must be Cora Sue's, saying:

"Oh! Oh, *don't*. . . Johnny!"

Then dark forms materialized, and something exploded against the back of his head.

FOR the majority of persons who have not felt a blow of sandbag or black-jack against their *medulla oblongata*, John's sudden plunge into semi-consciousness may have but slight meaning. But for any man who has felt such a blow, the struggle of flesh, will and spirit to withstand the shock and to fight a way out of mental obscurity into active being is a positive, vital and terrible thing that defies mere word-expression.

Let those who will, sneer at college athletics; it was those young years of training-tables, a gridiron and twenty-six fights for the intercollegiate middle-weight championship that stood him stead in that black moment. Cora Sue's frightened cry was imprinted in his subconscious; and the do-or-die will to act, born of the amateur ring and football's hardened muscles, grasped at every fiber in him. He saw himself in slow motion. He was plunged in a dark watery abyss and swimming frantically upward. The effort to move a finger was like a struggle against a thousand-pound weight.

On his knees, with strong hands gripping his body, a weight of darkness like a leaden overcoat crushing him down, he surged with his full weight and strength. His reaching hands made contact with an animate body, and clutched at it in a terrible fury. Hands, hands, hands were tearing at him, choking him, pulling at him, dragging him. He was being lifted against his will, as though gravity had ceased to be. Sibillant voices in some distorted language clicked and hissed.

Will won. Something struggled in his hands; a white-hot sear slashed his shoulder. He flung his big body erect, and heard his own voice emit a savage roar as the struggling thing yielded to his own power and came uprooted in his hands. Another searing pain cut him in the ribs, and he knew blood was flowing. He flung that thing in his hands, to the hard

marble floor, heard the thud of it, and the sensation cleared his head.

Fighting! Only a pale glow from the distant street arc revealed shadowy forms. Something hit him violently on the right shoulder where the burning hurt was, and he felt his whole side breaking, going limp. But with his left hand, he struck and felt a crunching as his fist reached flesh. His shoulders struck a mass, and the mass crumbled. Blows rained upon him, but they spattered like water on oil.

Now he saw more clearly. There were only three of them. One of them was already under his feet.

"*Madre mio!*" a throttled throat gasped as his hands closed on it. His arms lifted a body clean from the ground and hurled it crashing through invisible glass. A scream followed—a man's scream. That stabbing pain across his chest was the point of a knife, but his hands caught the thrusting arm and he felt it snap in his powerful twist as a hoarse yell burst out. For an instant he was untouched, felt nothing near—and in that bare instant he flung himself forward into the door, tripped, felt glass cut his leg, sprawled headlong, felt the shock of a body falling across him, heaved his own body upright and sent the other flying. Then like a man in a nightmare, he was flying toward the inner stairs as they were fumbling for him in the dark.

A blow from behind sent him staggering but located the stairs for him because he crashed into the banister. He charged up, and the hands were slipping from him in the darkness. He sensed a man right on top of him and hit out. A foreign voice gave a cry of rage and pain. Someone piled on him from higher up, and he fell, his head striking something sharp and hard, and consciousness went out of him again like a window closing in the soul.

HOW long he lay there, there was no knowing. He flicked his eyes open, with pain burning every corner of him, to see a man in pajamas and another in overalls, leaning over him. The lights had somehow gone on. He was on the lower flight of stairs in Cora Sue's apartment house.

"Why—why, it's Mr. Freeward. That's Miss Graybourne's feller. Say, what happened? Didja fall downstairs, or—"

Besides the pain and the vivid anger in him, the only emotion he had was a

terrible fear for Cora Sue. He pulled himself up quickly, silently, ignoring the good offices of the two men, and dashed upstairs, leaving them to gasp in astonishment.

Cora Sue's door was locked. He rang. Phyllis, in a nightdress opened the door.

"Why, John, isn't it a little—"

"Shut up! Where's Cora Sue?"

"You should know better than I. Good God, you're all bloody—or is this a gag? Would you be drunk, or on a charades party? Don't tell me; let me guess what you're supposed to—"

She stopped short and cried:

"Wait—John! Please, John, don't be like that, I was only—"

But John was being "like that." He turned away from her with a lurch and made three unsteady steps toward the stairs, then began going down, a little faster than need be, as though his feet might crumble if they could not keep up to his will.

CHAPTER VI

THE house in which Mr. John Latismer had been spending his now much-publicized vacation near Sarasota was much less the usual type of thing chosen by visiting Northerners from photos shown them by practical rental-office agents, than it was typical of the man himself. It was, purely and simply, a farmhouse, nothing more. It had charm but not grandeur; yet it had a certain assertive air to it, quiet but positive, which might remind a careful observer of the District Attorney's own unobtrusive power.

Since early morning the newspaper men had been arriving. No fewer than twelve of them, representing the big-city dailies and the two major news-services, had fairly taken possession of the front lawn. It had been no good trying to "crash the gate." The gates of John Latismer were notoriously "uncrashable," and the burly man in livery who looked more like a wrestler than a butler had been able to say, "Nobody sees him until he says the word," and make it stick.

Florida nights are often chillier than is generally supposed; and as evening fell, the lawn's temporary tenants grew both cold and restless. One of them growled:

"I wonder does Latismer think this is any way to get the newspapers behind him next election? Believe me, gents, I'm

going to hand that guy a panning when I get back. He isn't in such a good spot, anyhow. This is a dumb trick, keeping the boys hanging around all day."

Another replied:

"Latismser never pulls a dumb trick, feller. He pulls rabbits out of hats. Notice he didn't refuse to see us."

"Nuts, my friend!" chimed a third reporter. "He's freezing us out. Boy, I could use an overcoat in this sunny clime. And a good stiff drink."

But as if to give the lie to doubters, the door to the Latismser place opened, and the muscular butler called out:

"Okay, you boys. Come and get it."

It was due to the minor commotion that followed this announcement that the reporters failed to perceive the drive-yourself car which had crept cautiously from a side-road into Latismser's winding driveway and had stopped beyond the privet hedge to allow an out-of-breath gentleman of considerable corpulence to get down and conceal himself behind a latticed "summer-house." The prowler had a good face, under his soft black velour hat, and his clothes, although a little rumpled showed good tailoring. Certainly he was no tramp nor beggar. Yet his behavior was certainly that of a man who did not desire to be seen.

He watched the newspaper men as they were admitted, peering through the twilight. Then he glanced at an expensive watch, and blinked his eyes as he lifted his shoulders in a gesture more European than American. And when the door closed on the reporters, he lighted a cigar and relaxed in his uncomfortable seat, a man resolved to wait.

"I HAVE no good reason to give any of you a statement," Latismser was saying to the newspaper men gathered in his study, "in view of the attitude your papers have taken toward me. And yet it will serve my purpose to make one. It will be short as possible. I shall expect it to be quoted verbatim, warning you that the slightest change will be the immediate instrument of legal action against the paper which risks such a change. Is that perfectly clear?"

One of the reporters said:

"That's okay, Mr. Latismser—only, don't hold those editorials against us. We're just hired help trying to get a story. We'll stick to what you tell us to say. How about it, men?"

There was a chorus of agreement. Latismser's stiff attitude softened. He began:

"Thank you. My first statement is this: I shall fly to New York by chartered plane at midnight—"

"What plane, sir? What field?"

"A private plane and a private field. I don't care to be accompanied by the press, thank you." The D.A.'s smile was like the glint of a knife-blade.

"My next statement," he went on, "is that instead of persisting in taking a vacation to the detriment of my official duties,—as your papers have so delicately implied,—I have, on the contrary, remained down here with the purpose of keeping the clearer perspective given by distance from the confusion and muddle which seems to have taken possession of all concerned in these cases back home—including, may I add, the master-minds of the press."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed one of the reporters. "That hurt."

LATISMSEr made no comment but went on:

"And from this vantage point I have worked out a theory which may lead to the prompt solution of all three crimes, more especially the murder of Giuseppe Maldochini."

One reporter growled: "You wouldn't be kidding the boys, would you, D.A.?"

Latismser gave him a sharp look.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't. I believe that the police and all concerned have been too close to the *physical* features of these crimes to obtain a clear sight of the *psychological* features. For instance—and you may print this if you will: no one seems to have observed that, although Maldochini is an Italian, there has been no effort on the part of either the Italian consulate or legation to put pressure on when he is killed. I have been in touch with the State Department in Washington—"

"Hey, that's dead right. Not only is he an Italian, but a famous one. And the consulate hasn't—"

This was one of the newspaper men, struck by the fact just pointed out.

Latismser smiled.

"You'll admit it is odd. One can hardly imagine an American musician of consequence being murdered abroad without our embassy's making serious diplomatic representations—"

"But Mr. Latismser—"

"One moment, please. Another point is that no one seems to have taken the trouble to discover Maldochini's passport. Obviously he must have one. It

may interest you to learn that he came in on a League of Nations passport, not an Italian one."

"Hey, hey! What's that mean?"

"It means he was not an Italian subject at all," said Latismer. "I have advice by cable from reliable sources to the effect that Maldochini was disgraced by his government, deprived of citizenship and virtually exiled last September. He did not sail to this country from Italy, but from Palma in Majorca, via Villefranche. He had been living in Palma since his estate in Girgente was confiscated in September. This fact has never been released to the press; you are aware of the kind of censorship that is in effect under the Fascist government."

"Then what do you think—"

Latismer shrugged; it appeared that he did not intend at this time to make known his speculations, if any. He said:

"I think it may have bearing upon his death. If you care to print my statement, —and I am sure that you will,—it may further my theories. That is all, gentlemen. I bid you good evening. It is already past nine o'clock. There is a train at ten from Sarasota. And a plane at fifteen, I believe."

And with that abrupt dismissal, he bowed them out of the room.

As they departed in a body from the house, one of them could not refrain from a remark of the I-told-you-so order.

"Rabbits," he said, "out of his hat! That's Latismer for you. I got a date with the nearest telephone."

THE District Attorney resumed his seat in his study, opening the windows to permit the smoke of the visiting newspaper men to escape. His work comprised three columns of tabulations on a sheet of scratch-paper. He studied them; he frowned at them; he consulted his watch. He saw no corporeal body from which the voice might have come, but he heard the voice, distinctly:

"Latismer? Psst! Latismer!"

In the window facing the lawn he saw a shadow. His hand was rapid in producing from a clip under his desk a small but serviceable automatic.

"Don't move!" he said. "I can drive a nail at this distance with a thirty-eight." Except that his voice had an edge to it, it showed no emotion.

"Oi, oil!" said this intruding shadow. "Now, don't drive me no nails, Latismer, I aint a burglar; it's me, Schuldrein."

"Who? Step into the light."



"Schuldrein, the music promoter, it's me. Take that thing away. I come all the way down here to tell you things, and you would drive nails in me! Oi, oi!"

The shaft of light from Latismer's desk-lamp revealed a plump, soft, rather genteel face framed in the window. Below it was a bulky body. The District Attorney, a frequenter of musical events, knew that face.

"Come in, Schuldrein," he said. "Keep your hands visible. Open the window—it works like a door. And why not come to the front door, while you're about it?"

JAKE SCHULDREIN, a man whose name spelled all that is notable in the world of professional musicians, stepped through the French window, holding his hands like two teacups so full they trembled. He was both ludicrous and pitiful. His plump face had fallen until it resembled a bird-dog's mournful countenance.

"Please, I esk you, will you put that thing away?" he said. "Oi, oi, what a business for Jake Schuldrein, coming in windows now, is it?"

Latismer could not repress a brief twitching of the lips as he returned the gun to its clip under the desk.

"I said, why the devil didn't you come to the door?" he urged again. "And since you are down here in Florida, we— But sit down, Schuldrein, and relax. What's on your mind?"

"To the door I should be coming, is it?" panted the impresario. "And the cops maybe here already, how should I know?"

"The cops?"

"Ach, Himmel! Why else would I be coming here like a sneak-thief, aint it?"

"What the devil would the police—"

The D.A.'s mild amazement increased. "Are you coming here to hand yourself over to me for some reason?"

"Am I crazy? When I aint done nothing yet?"

"Then suppose you start from the beginning and let me in on this business." Schuldrein sank into a chair.

"It's this Jo Maldochini, which the cops think I shoot him."

"Maldochini? And did you?"

Schuldrein's eyebrows lifted to the back of his totally bald dome.

"Am I such a fool? It aint like I wouldn't be glad if somebody done it for me, such a gyp he was that Maldochini, but I didn't do it."

Latismer's attention was close now.

"I gather that a great many persons weren't exactly displeas'd at his death—but I wasn't aware that you were under suspicion."

"Listen, if hate was bullets, then Jo Maldochini's corpse would weigh a ton right now, for the lead that's in him. But it's this here Quill—"

Latismer nodded understandingly,

"Quill, eh? He's a good bloodhound, Quill is. I imagine the newspapers made him uncomfortable, and he went hunting for a victim. Tell me about it!"

Schuldrein used vast gestures as he spoke. He said that some of the orchestra musicians had told Quill of a violent discussion between him, Schuldrein, and the late maestro, and that the detective, grabbing at another possible motive and clue, had given the impresario a summons to appear for questioning. For reasons of his own he had not appeared, however, and Quill had come to arrest him in his office. Fortunately, Schuldrein had been able to avoid them by vanishing down the seldom used stairway of his office building, while they ransacked his offices. He had gone straight to the airport and taken a plane to Florida, meaning to do just what he was now doing—lay the whole story in the lap of the District Attorney.

Latismer was plainly puzzled.

"What I don't quite get is why you refused to answer Quill's summons," he said. "That makes you liable to arrest, and it certainly does nothing to allay any suspicions he might have. Besides, if you know yourself to be innocent, why in heaven's name didn't you appear?"

FROM the expression on Schuldrein's face, it was evident that right here was the crux of the matter.

"Aint I got to think of my position, now?" he demanded. "If I go down and let them coppers work on me, then it all comes out."

"What comes out?"

The impresario looked both crestfallen and embarrassed. He hesitated, evidently not quite certain that he wanted to do the very thing he had taken such extreme measures to do. Presently he appeared to have come to a decision, and

began talking, head down, his eyes fixed upon his chubby hands.

"Well, I got to tell you. It comes out anyhow sometime if I don't. Well—I got a record, Mr. Latismer—a prison record. Only six months, maybe, but that's enough, aint it?"

LATISMER stared at the man in frank amazement.

"That is a rather startling confession for a man of your position," he said finally.

"That is thirty years ago now," Schuldrein went on. "Thirty years, it is, when I was young and dumb, fresh from the other side and living in Boston."

"Boston?"

"But the name aint Schuldrein; it's Kleinfeldt on the books, which you can check it. A little business I had with a feller named Spear. Kleinfeldt & Spear, we was, booking carnivals and small-time stuff, and maybe a couple hick orchestras. One day I get a chance to promote a big show if I have the money, which I didn't. So I borrow some of the company money without I tell Spear about it. Oi, oi, such mess I am in it! The show is a flop, and poor Larry Spear he gets sick and dies, and the banks get a hold of the books. And then this wop Maldochini—"

"Maldochini?"

"Sure, he was a fiddler in a ham orchestra which we was booking, only he is plain Jo Rosso then."

"I am amazed. I was under the impression that Giuseppe Maldochini had never been in America until he came—"

"Don't I know? Didn't I practical write all them stories in the newspapers? I got a smart little gal which writes what I tell her and don't esk no questions; but you should believe all you read in the musics business, Mr. Latismer, on account all them fellers have names Sacha and Jascha is likely just Mike O'Brien or Abe Schmidt. But Jo Maldochini he was there, and glad if he got twenty bucks a week with transportation, and a lousy fiddler at that. He goes back to Italy and writes a symphony, so he says, which wins him a prize and gets him a big rep, but for my money he is still lousy."

"I think I begin to perceive—"

"You don't perceive nothing yet, Mr. Latismer. When them musicians tell it I had a row with Maldochini, it's true. Ever since he gets to be a big-shot conductor, I am always trying to sign him

plan behind it. And then the operator called him to announce that Mr. Latimer was no longer at his address, sorry.

"But I can't just sit here and drip while Cora Sue is being—"

He had an impulse to go to the police and report being assaulted, but he dismissed that as futile.

"They'd only waste time checking up on me. They'd probably figure I was drunk, anyhow—with a pan like mine. Besides, the only cop who could see the connection with the Maldochini thing is Quill, and God knows how to get hold of him at this time in the morning."

There, of course, was the striking feature of it all.

"It's got to be that Maldochini business. Nobody would try to snatch Cora Sue unless they had a reason, and the only reason would be that they're afraid of her. And the only thing they'd be afraid of would be that she knows something and might tell it."

They, they, they, they, they! Who in thunder were "They?"

He finished his bath and patching himself over, and sat in his dressing-gown smoking endless cigarettes, making idle marks on scraps of paper in an endeavor to make some sense out of what had happened, but no clear sense seemed forthcoming.

"Organization!" That word seemed to be material. "It has all the earmarks of some organized bunch trying to cover up tracks of their murder of the maestro. If Cora Sue saw the scar-faced man in that box, then he might think—"

A bell rang like an explosion, and John looked at his alarm-clock to see the hands pointing toward six.

"And here I sit in a muddle like a stupid fool, getting nothing done. I'm going down to headquarters and tell Quill. He'll be—"

ANOTHER bell exploded, the telephone this time.

"That you, Freeward?" came a vaguely familiar voice. "This is Latimer. Now you listen and let me talk. I'm at a small flying-field near Chanford. Just got in. I want you to meet me and do something for me. I think I've got this murder in hand and I don't want to risk any interference from the papers. You take a taxicab right in front of your place and drive out on Route 3. There is only one road, and you'll pass a flying-field. That's it."

"Yes sir, and believe me I'm glad you—"

"Never mind that, now; listen to me: You pack a bag. I may want you to take a trip for me. I'll expect you here by eight o'clock. Get going, John, and keep out of sight."

The line clicked and went dead.

CHAPTER VII

FOR those few minutes between the instant dark forms had emerged upon her from the darkness of her hall and the later instant when she felt motion under and around her, Cora Sue had experienced a form of suspended animation. Not unconsciousness, in the real sense of the word, nor yet hysteria. She knew in a shadowy way, for instance, that she had cried out to John, and that she had struggled against the hands that were holding her, and that she actually bit one of them. She knew that a cloth or bag had been dropped over her head and held there, and that the hands had lifted her up and carried her. But she had no real perception of actuality nor of reality. She sensed herself, rather than saw, in the third person, objectively.

And then, discovering herself, so to speak, wedged into a comparatively soft cushioned seat, tied there with a rope around her body, but with the feeling of swift motion and the purr of a motor under her, brought her sharply back into this world again with a savage, cruel snap of reality.

She screamed.

A strong hand felt for her face through the cloth that covered it, and thrust her head back violently. A voice said:

"Basta! Shut up!"

And that effectively put a stop to all action. Futility overwhelmed her.

Kidnaping? But kidnaping implies ransom money, and ransom implies riches. Who would ransom a Cora Sue Graybourne? Her father dead, her brother a cripple since the war, her mother struggling to maintain a kind of passive respectability in what remained of an ancient plantation, now nearly dissolved by debt and mortgage. No, kidnaping was absurd.

That kind of thinking died a natural death as the car began to slow down and foreign-sounding voices came through the thick cloth. Presently it stopped, and she heard a door open and hands took hold of her. The voices were louder now, speaking in Italian. It *was* Italian, surely.

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She was being carried again. The sudden cold passed, and a door slammed behind somewhere and she felt herself being lifted up some stairs. Terror came back to her again. For an instant it had left her, but now she wanted to scream again, wanted to cry out, wanted to shriek for succor.

But a sharp, positive voice spoke a few rattling words in Italian, and the hands lowered her toward the floor so that she could set her feet on something soft yet solid. A carpet, perhaps. Then another sharp command, and the ropes which held her arms at her sides were released as the cloth was lifted from her head.

"This is most unfortunate, signorina," said that same hard voice in English which bore a foreign tinge. "But do not be alarmed. No harm is intended. Please to sit down. It will not be good if you make noise."

It was a very tiny room she was in. The light was bad, and her startled eyes could barely focus upon the doorway, in which stood an overcoated figure, upright, with a black hat pulled down over the upturned collar to conceal any face which might have been in the coat. She sensed other men in the room behind her, but she was too frightened to look around. Had she been the fainting kind, she might well have swooned. Instead she was able to steady herself and to make her voice say:

"What does this mean? Where am I? What right have you to—Why did you bring me here?"

The overcoated form folded its arms and appeared to be contemplating her from under the hat.

"All that is not too easy to make answer, signorina," said the voice. "But let us say you are in a place where it does not matter if you scream. A factory building, signorina, and the watchman who sleeps sometimes in this room, he is—not here. In the morning they will come and find you, signorina, but you will be here until it is eight o'clock. Do not be afraid; you will be alone."

CORA SUE could not sit down as urged. She stammered:

"Do you—want money? I haven't any money, except twenty dollars or—"

"But we do not wish your money, signorina," the voice broke in. "We desire only that you remain here until after six hours of the morning. In my country, signorina, it would be easier—for us.

A bullet, perhaps, or a knife. But in this America we do not desire an international incident, no. It is better that you are here where you may not talk."

"But I—what right have you to—"

"The right of self-defense, signorina. It is regrettable, but it is desirable that you remain here until I shall have departed from this country. You do not understand? *Bene*. So much for the better."

He made a rapid remark in Italian and vanished into the darkness outside the door, as two men stepped from behind her and joined him. His voice came from the hall or room behind the door, saying:

"It will be warm here, signorina, and there is a cot upon which to sleep. Do not try to escape through the window, which is seventy feet above the ground. It is useless to call out, for the windows are upon a court, and the street is where your voice cannot be heard. See? We do not fasten you. You are free to walk about on this floor as you wish. But the doors are locked until morning, when the factory shall open. *Addio, signorina*. Be advised to remain calm."

And she could hear their footsteps retreating while within her heart was a terrified pulsation.

A FIVE-DOLLAR bill will charter a taxicab for a considerable distance, as John soon discovered. It requires a little discussion, perhaps; but at that hour of the morning most taxi-drivers are happy to make a flat rate and get started for their day.

The road was simple and fast as far as Chanford, but that small town—larger, John discovered, than is generally suspected—is a maze of streets, crossroads and inept road-signs, so that twenty minutes or more was lost in discovering the road to the airport. But after three false starts, and with the aid of a colored policeman who proved far more intelligent than his paler colleagues had been, they got under way, while John fumbled nervously with his watch, staring at the speeding minute-hand as the machine's fifty miles hourly seemed a snail's pace.

It was then eight o'clock, and it was fifteen minutes later when the terrain flattened out and a row of small hangars in the distance suggested that they must be approaching the flying-field of which Latismer had spoken.

There could be no mistake about the field as soon as the cab drew alongside

the white fence that separated it from the road. A shiny cabin plane, not large as an air-liner but definitely bigger than the open-cockpit jobs that stood around the field, glistened in the early morning twilight. The tall, statuesque figure of the District Attorney in a black overcoat with fur collar stood at the entrance to the field, while a corpulent individual somewhat more spectacularly dressed but unknown to John stood with him, puffing a cigar.

THERE was no time for greeting. Latismier stepped toward the cab as John descended, saying:

"Good for you, John! But don't get out; we'll need that cab. I'm putting you on a plane for Washington as soon as we can. By the way, do you know Mr. Schuldrein? Come along, Schuldrein and get in. This is the young man I told you of."

"Ach, Miss Graybourne's feller! How do? Sometimes I seen you at my office, aint it?"

John could hardly take the impresario's hand before he burst out with the tragic news of Cora Sue's disappearance. Both men listened in astonishment as he crowded detail upon detail in his excited recitation, and the taxicab sped along toward the public airport. When he paused for breath, Latismier said:

"Great Scott, that's bad news, John! But I think it proves my—ah—our theory, eh, Schuldrein?"

But the rotund impresario was babbling mingled praises for "Miss Graybourne" his "hend-raised press gel," and consternation at the news of her incredible adventure and abduction.

"Oi, oi, with them wops you never know what comes any minute, a knife in the belly maybe, or a bomb in the bathroom. Oi, the poor gel! And me with the cops thinking I am moidering Jo Maldochini so I can't—"

"I doubt if any real harm has come to her," said Latismier. "If they meant to kill her, they would not have taken the trouble to carry her away. You're quite sure about that car being outside, John? And that they were Italians?"

"Oh, yes sir, there's no mistake about that. What I don't see is why anybody should—"

"It all seems to fit into a theory I have. In fact, I might have suspected it—had I known all the details in advance. But if your trip to Washington is successful, I fancy we will have no



trouble in unearthing the right party, and getting you—ah—fiancée back again, safe and sound."

"You mean—you think you know who—" John was mildly amazed, although he was aware of the reputation of Mr. Latismier for performing almost miraculous sleight-of-hand effects in the obtaining of convictions.

"Call it a theory—so far. The thing that has struck me is that the Italian embassy and consulate has made no effort to hasten prosecution of the murderer of a man like Maldochini. Now your trip to Washington is for one purpose only—namely, to discover what the Embassy thinks about the deceased maestro. Schuldrein says the man was not exactly favored by the Fascist government last summer, and I have evidence to the effect that he had been deprived of citizenship. I suspect that there may be a semi-political side to all this. Remember the Black Hand organization? And the Maffia? To the newspaper men, they seemed to be just a bunch of murderers. But in reality, they resembled the Chinese tongs, having their background in Italian politics. Were he a Russian or a German, I would look into the Ogpu or the Gestapo activities as a possible explanation of his—ah—elimination. Being Italian, however, I suspect some unofficial but political organization which may—"

JOHN broke in:

"But if Dr. Bankler's theory—about poisoning, I mean—is correct, and the toxicologist seemed to prove that it is, then even so you would have to show how he was killed. That bullet—"

"Hm-m-m. I confess I am disregarding that question. A man lies dead with a bullet in his head. Somebody must have fired that bullet. It seems pretty satisfactory, all in all, that the bullet could have killed him. I'm not going to split scientific hairs. I want the man—or men—responsible for that bullet. Assuming that my theory is right, and that it was a political bullet, then the Blanchamps murder—by a knife-thrust—could be explained away quite simply."

"I don't quite see how, sir."

"You yourself said she was seen to enter that box—the only place likely where the assassin would have been hiding."

"Then you mean she was killed to—"

"Exactly. To silence her. Yvonne Blanchamps had a keen nose for money. I have done some quick work by cable and I have learned that she was the beneficiary of Maldochini's will. Whoever arranged for that shot to be fired knew not only Vanderstitt Hall but the very musical score which was being played. It took fine timing to judge the moment in advance. My theory is that the singer either had a quarrel with her—her ancient benefactor, or else discovered that his will was worth no more than so much paper. Perhaps both. In that case she might have offered her conspiring services to whoever wanted to do away with Maldochini. Yet she was perfectly capable of double-crossing them, as they may have known."

"But there's her husband, Ambin. Circumstantial evidence suggests he killed her. It can't be proved, now he's dead. And—well, heart-failure may not be just the—"

Latismer nodded.

"I know. If this heart-failure turned out to be some fancy poison,—as they're trying to show in the Maldochini business,—then my theory is shaken because the premise is based on a shooting. Grant one poisoning, then the other is almost proved. But I'm going to *assume* Ambin's heart-failure as legitimate. . . . God knows he had physiological and psychological cause enough to make him die of shock, seeing his wife lying dead—that's about what the police make of his story, from what I understand of it. Let's assume it. Keep away from the fantastic and cling to rationality."

JOHN saw the logic of that, but there still remained in the background of his mind—and in his wallet, too—that broken bit of needle with its curious piece of thread still clinging to it. Quill had scoffed at it. Even he himself had thought himself out of considering it as anything triumphant; and yet—the idea of it persisted.

"Well sir, there's one thing that—well, it's probably nothing at all, but—I wish you wouldn't laugh at it, but I can't quite put it out of my mind. I told you about Cora Sue picking that thread off Maldochini's arm, but I didn't tell you that I found another piece."

And he produced the little fragment from its hiding-place and told the story of it to Mr. Latismer. The D.A. did not laugh. He considered it carefully, weighed it in his mind, shook his head, and said carefully:

"It is interesting—but any application of it to the murder would be far-fetched, John. Looks like a broken hypodermic needle. But that doesn't explain the thread. And a hypodermic needle would raise the suicide question once more—which hardly fits with a shooting, does it? And it certainly doesn't cast any light upon the abduction of Miss Graybourne. I suggest that you hand it to Dr. Muth when you come back from Washington—just to cover all possibilities; but I hardly think it will be revealing, unless of course his laboratory discovers traces of some fantastic poison, which is not only unlikely but which knocks all sane theories into a cocked hat. For the moment I'm going to follow out my theories. I'll need your information, at any rate. You'll be in the capital at noon and you will be able to telephone me before three o'clock. Now let's get down to the details."

GIVE Phyllis Dent credit; she was entirely honest in her ill-spoken and ill-timed response to John Freeward when he appeared before her door, bedraggled, dirty, torn and bloody, asking for Cora Sue that previous evening. Her feminine instinct told her that Cora Sue had not yet entirely forgiven John for his earlier blunders at Vanderstitt Hall on that fatal night, and that having gone to a night-club with the amusing Englishman Wengalle, she was perfectly capable of making John suffer in a million little ways that women know only too well. And so she concluded at sight, that John had got himself into a drunken fight, had either left Cora Sue and Wengalle or had been deserted by them, and had returned sheepishly to find out the full depth of his disgrace. That, she knew, was a classical performance.

Hence her rather distant and even caustic greeting of the young man.

But when, after an hour had passed and Cora Sue had not returned to the flat, she telephoned the Jupiter Club and found that the party had left early and that there had been no trouble, she began to regret her reception of the young man. And when, in the morning there was no silken blonde head pillowed on Cora Sue's bed, Phyllis was definitely

disturbed. By the time she had breakfasted alone and was ready to leave for her job at the Museum, she was as near to panic as such a girl can ever be.

At a quarter to nine, her telephone rang. A man's voice wanted to know:

"Is this Miss Dent? Miss Phyllis Dent, we want—put her on the wire. This is the Newtown Road police station. Sergeant Macey speaking."

"The police! Yes, this is Phyllis Dent. What's wrong?"

"Sorry to trouble you, miss, but there's been some trouble. We've got a girl here says she lives with you."

"Cora—Miss Graybourne? Why—"

"That's the name she give us, miss. Will you come over here and identify her?"

"Identify her! Good God, is she—"

"She's in plenty trouble. She is—you better get over here right away, miss."

As her taxicab rumbled swiftly out through the suburbs, Phyllis' perplexity increased with every foot of the journey. "A girl here says she lives with you!" the man had said. And, "There's been some trouble, miss!" As if Sue hadn't had enough trouble for any girl with this Maldochini business and her nasty mess with Yvonne Blanchamps and the nosy cops....

Sergeant Macey sat at a high desk and looked down at Phyllis through puckering eyes.

"Glad you come so quick, miss. This here is a funny case. The little gal's story is—well, plenty screwy: says she was grabbed right in her own hallway last night and carried out here. We got a call from the foreman at Maseratti Brothers Stamping Mill—the big place behind the airport over there—just after eight this morning. They said the watchman had been clubbed to death and there was a girl locked up in the eighth-floor shop. We come and got her, but we can't make much sense out of her. She's pretty scared and pretty—well, you better go in and see her."

CORA SUE was indeed in a state of mental shock. She flung herself upon Phyllis and cried hysterically for fully fifteen minutes before any articulate story came out of her. Finally, however, Phyllis was able to get the recitation of events piece by piece and to put them all together to make a kind of fantastic but comprehensible sequence.

"You say the lights were off in the hall and that they jumped on you while John

was paying the cab? Good Lord, Sue! That poor boy, I—I thought he was drunk and—well, never mind that now. Who were they? Didn't you see them? Why should they do anything like this to you? What was—"

Sue could not answer much of this. She had not seen either the assailants nor the man who, apparently, was employing them to seize her. She remembered his words, however—"right of self-defense, signorina . . . better that you remain here until I shall have departed from this country." Those sentences had some meaning, some clue to it all.

PHYLLIS snatched at them in her swift way. "That's it, of course—Maldochini!"

"Mr. Maldochini? Why, he—"

"They think you know who killed him. They think you saw something or that you know something, and—"

"But I've told everything I know!"

"Perhaps not. Perhaps you haven't said just the right thing yet. Perhaps you don't recognize it yourself—they're afraid you'll let it out, even if you don't know what it is. They killed Miss Blanchamps because she knew. They killed her husband, probably. And the man said he wanted you held where you couldn't talk until he got away. That would mean—that would mean a ship, probably. Some boat sailing before eight o'clock this morning. There can't be very many of them."

She turned to the policemen who had stood by, witnessing this scene of recognition, saying:

"Call Lieutenant Quill of the Homicide Bureau. He'll know all about this. Call Mr. Freeward at the District Attorney's office. . . . He won't be there probably, but call him anyhow. But we've got to see Quill. We've got to hurry."

"Hold on, miss; this is a murder case. Somebody conked that night watchman, and this girl was right there, and—"

"Get hold of Lieutenant Quill, and he'll clear all that up for you. This is a lot bigger than any night watchman. Call him. Please call him. Oh, can't you see that every minute counts?"

Sergeant Macey detailed a man to put in a call. The man returned presently saying:

"Quill aint over at Homicide. He's gone over to the D.A.'s office. It looks like something's busted loose there."

"Then take us over," urged Phyllis. "Please take us over in a patrol car."

Policeman Macey glowered down at the two girls.

"I think you're makin' a monkey out of us, miss; but since it's old Quill you want, I'll risk it. Let's go."

CHAPTER VIII

IT was a faintly pleasurable sensation, even to a man as cool and blasé as Mr. Latismer, to sense the feeling of relieved gladness with which his staff members greeted him when he arrived that morning. All the staff, that is to say, save perhaps Mr. Dillion, who seemed a trifle disconcerted.

"Why—er—how do you do, sir!" said Dillion. "So the papers were right in saying you'd be with us today. I trust your vacation was pleasant—such as it was."

"Thank you, Dillion. You've kept the office open, I see."

And he let it go at that while he removed his hat, coat and gloves, as Dillion scrambled to vacate the front office where he had presided during his chief's absence.

There was no time for further exchanges, for hardly had the People's lawyer seated himself, when the communications-box on his desk announced that a large number of newspaper reporters had descended for interview. Latismer knew his press and how to handle its representatives. He had them enter, in a body, made a brief statement to the effect that he "had no statement" at the moment, but that the day would surely provide them with an important story, and dismissed them before they could beleaguer him with their ready questions.

An explosion in the outer corridor announced the entrance of Lieutenant Quill, who stormed in with blood in his eye, vociferating that his department had traced Schuldrein to Mr. Latismer's winter residence near Sarasota.

"What kind of coöperation you think that is, D.A.?" he roared. "Here I got my first real lead in this lousy case, and you go and hide him—and you the District Attorney! You want all the credit for all the stuff we cops can do?"

Latismer kept his coolness.

"Hardly that, Quill," he said evenly. "Frankly, I knew nothing about your suspicions of Schuldrein until he came to my place voluntarily and unasked, and told me himself. If I had thought

him guilty of murder, I'd have had him arrested down there, but I know he isn't."

"The hell he isn't. I got enough on that fat guy to hold him from now on."

"Possibly, but it doesn't apply to Maldochini's death, Quill. As a matter of fact, I brought Schuldrein back with me. He is probably in his own apartment right now. If you feel that you really must question him, I promise you he will appear on demand. But I wouldn't do it."

"And why, now, I want to know? The dirt I uncovered about that musical stockbroker would be enough to—"

Latismer gave him a sidelong glance.

"I presume you refer to—shall we say a past record. He told me about it. Take that along with the fact that he nearly committed mayhem on Maldochini before witnesses, and I'll admit it looks bad; but Schuldrein never killed the maestro, Quill. Better wait awhile before you go off on that tangent. I think the day may hold a few surprises."

"The hell you say!" growled Quill. "I read all the soap you handed the newspapers, but you can't make me believe you come back here and grab a murderer out of your sleeve after we all been—"

He might have said more, but he was interrupted by a voice through the communications-box once more.

"Mr. Latismer? Something screwy going on, sir. There's a couple of Chanford cops out here with two dames in tow. They want to see Lieutenant Quill, and they're looking for Mr. Freeward only he aint here."

Latismer's brow puckered.

"Did you say they came from Chanford?"

"That's right. It don't make much sense, but those two dames—"

"Send them in."

And when Cora Sue Graybourne, Phyllis Dent, and their two official escorts entered the office, a situation which had seemed lucid to John Latismer became clouded, obscure and yet nearer to its solution.

MR. DILLION had plans. Moreover, he had made a discovery. And for that reason Mr. Dillion was in the act of slipping out of the office door while Cora Sue Graybourne, Phyllis and the Chanford policeman were entering.

Follow Mr. Dillion to his mysterious destination: the massive building which housed the *Chronicle*.

Mr. Wellington Peavey, city editor, is a man who knows news when he sees it. Better than that, he can recognize a scoop when one walks from the street unsolicited and grins at him across a desk. And so when Mr. Dillion and Mr. Peavey were closeted in Mr. Peavey's small office adjoining the city room, the doors closed, it was not long before a piece of first-rate villainy was being spawned between them.

"YOU know me, Peavey," Dillion was saying. "I have a respectable record of ten or fifteen years in public offices—a good party man, you'll admit, but not a man to head up a good election campaign. I know my limitations and admit them. Conservative, is the correct word."

"All right, Dillion. You want something—what is it? Cut the preamble."

"I do, in fact. I want John Latismier's job."

Peavey whistled.

"You and about five hundred other lawyers in this town," he observed.

"What is it to me?"

"Just this: Your paper practically put Latismier into office. Right now you are panning him. You are taking away your support."

"Not exactly. Latismier is playing prima donna by staying away when he's needed. We're going to crack that concert-hall murder case one way or another. I'm in the business of getting news, even if I have to make it. Latismier's a good man—one of the best. But that's only a personal opinion. Officially, he's laying down on an important job. We're roasting him, true enough, but that is only part of a bigger thing. We're out to get a new deal for the citizens of this town—better policing, better protection. The *Chronicle* has started that movement, and we've forced the other papers to follow our lead. That says the whole thing in a nutshell, but just where do you come in? You want my personal opinion again? I've nothing against you, Dillion, but you'd make a rotten district attorney. You simply aren't the type. Now what are you trying to sell me?"

"I'm not quite a fool, Peavey," said Dillion with a show of bravado. "Those high-sounding phrases mean very little. Your paper has trumped up a remarkable circulation-getting scheme at the expense of the public's temper. But unless you can actually produce the mur-

derer of Giuseppe Maldochini—and do it before some other paper does it, at that—your scheme falls flat and you have an impossible situation on your hands.

"Now here is my proposition: I have uncovered material evidence which, properly employed, will of a certainty lead to a solution of Maldochini's murder. Solving that will solve the death of Yvonne Blanchamps, merely by making it simple. I can present this evidence to the police and take such credit as I may get for it. I can trade it to another newspaper for their backing. Or I can exchange it for the *Chronicle's* support next election—written agreement. There you are."

Peavey did not reply at once; he merely contemplated Dillion with a look of amazed contempt. Then he said, "Wait a minute," and turned a switch on his communications-box, calling out:

"Hello, boss, you there?"

A voice demanded what was wanted.

"I wish you'd come down here right away—something hot."

CYRUS T. BARNEVELD, owner and publisher of the *Chronicle*, was a rarity in modern newspaper circles. Rare, because he owned his paper outright and was not a corporation. Rarer, because he spent five hours daily at his office instead of entrusting such an enterprise to a paid manager. When Mr. Barneveld thrust his corpulence into Peavey's office, his mood was not an expansive one, and for good reason. Peavey had put the *Chronicle* "out on a limb." While it was pleasant to envisage the leadership, the power which would belong to the revived old *Chronicle* if they succeeded in clearing up Maldochini's murder where the police had fumbled it, it was quite another thing to envisage what might happen if they failed to do it. Or if some other paper's staff should succeed in the *Chronicle's* stead. For Mr. Barneveld knew, and so did Peavey, that though they had printed in the *Chronicle* a challenge to the police and the city government, threatening to solve the crime within a week, if the authorities failed to do so, they in fact possessed not one clue, inkling or lead to the mystery, of which the police—and likewise the entire public—were not already possessed. In a mere matter of days, now, his paper must make good—or become a public laughing-stock.

"Well, Peavey?" he said as he came in. "Ah, Mr. Dillion. 'Morning."



"Hello, boss. Sit down, will you? This Dillion says he has dope that will lead us to the Maldochini murderer."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Barneveld, with feeling.

"But he also has ideas about how to use it."

"Meaning?"

"He wants to get Latismers' job. He'll trade his dope for our support."

Barneveld thought that one through.

"You mean—"

"Yeah, I mean just that. We take his dope, and we slaughter Latismers while we solve the murder. Then we tout Dillion for office next election. The old *Chronicle* becomes the savior of life and liberty. Circulation jumps a million. The new D.A. is this rodent Dillion."

Dillion stiffened, at that.

"Now, see here, Peavey—" he began, but the city editor smashed his fist on the desk.

"You're a lousy, sneaking rat, Dillion, and you'd sell your own mother's hide for a drumhead. Personally I think you smell. But I'm bound to listen to what you've got, unless the boss says I can toss you out of the window—which, may I say, would be a pleasure."

"I'll have you understand—"

"Shut up!" Peavey was a big man when he stood up, and Dillion shrank back into his chair. "This paper doesn't need your kind of help, Dillion. Even if you've got something—which I doubt—we wouldn't trade you—"

But Cyrus Barneveld's voice cut in:

"One moment, Peavey. You express my personal sentiments perfectly, but— but unfortunately, the *Chronicle* is an institution. Our position in this challenge is a dubious one, at best. If this man can show me, in a word, that he can lead us to a new angle on that case, I think I would agree to trade such support as we might have."

DILLION relaxed, and a sly smile came over his face. Dillion's skin, perhaps, was no thicker than the skin of most men, but he was not the man to allow mere insult to interfere with well-laid plans for progress. He spoke very slowly, as though weighing each word:

"I can show you," he said. "But I will want a written agreement in such a form as would incriminate this paper entirely, in the event you gentlemen—ah—are thinking of—"

"Double-crossing you?" snarled Peavey. "Only a rat would think of that."

And Barneveld said:

"How do I know you aren't bluffing, Dillion?"

"Because I'm going to give you a clue to it—one that you cannot use without my help."

"Well?"

"Maldochini's name was Rosso—Giuseppe Rosso. He was a fifth-rate violinist in America until 1915, when he got mixed up in a scandal and ran out of the country."

"So what?"

"Yvonne Blanchamps' is a stage name. The woman's own name is Rosso—Angelina Rosso."

"Good heavens! His sister?" This was Barneveld.

Dillion shook his head.

"No, his wife. They were married in America."

"Which proves?" This was skeptical Peavey.

"Nothing—except that Maldochini had filed a will. He named Angelina Rosso in his will. I have a brother who is a surrogate—not in this city, gentlemen."

ABSOLUTE silence followed that statement. Peavey got up from his seat and paced the floor. Finally he snorted with ill-concealed disgust:

"You can go to hell, for all me."

But Mr. Barneveld held up a hand in remonstrance.

"Let me see the kind of agreement you think we might sign," he said. Dillion fumbled in an inner pocket. Peavey was staring at his employer with a strange expression on his face.

"You aren't going to do it, boss," he said in a low voice. "The *Chronicle* has always been a clean paper. I wouldn't work for any other kind."

Barneveld's face showed signs of red, but he shook his head.

"Business," he said, "is business, Peavey. I'd rather have Dillion for D.A. than see the *Chronicle* fold up. Let's have your proposition, Dillion."

Peavey said something unprintable.

Dillion gave an oily smile.

Barneveld took a paper from Dillion's hand and fixed on his nose-glasses.

JOHN LATISMER had got to his feet. "So you didn't actually see this man you think is an Italian, Miss Graybourne?" he asked. "I mean to say, you did not see him well enough to describe him or identify him?"

"Oh, no. He was standing there in the door with a hat on and his collar turned up around his face; and besides, I was so frightened and—"

"I can quite imagine how you felt. But you are quite sure that he was a foreigner?"

"Yes indeed. He was an Italian—I'm almost positive."

"Not Spanish, you think? There is a similarity of language and accent, you know."

Cora Sue considered this, but said:

"I don't think so. You see I—well, I've studied Italian a little. I—I wanted to be a singer once and I—"

"Language of opera, eh? Well, let us assume he was a foreigner of some kind—"

"Oh, he was. I'm sure of that."

"And by his own words he was leaving this country sometime before eight o'clock this morning."

He turned to Quill:

"I wish you'd send one of your men to the local office of the Neapolitan. I happen to notice that their ship *Belluca* sailed at five this morning. I believe that is the only passenger line with such early sailings in winter. However, we'll check that. I want to know when she cleared the emigration office, and precisely what her position is expected to be at four o'clock. I'll check with the Port Authority on freight vessels, meanwhile."

Quill seemed to disapprove. He said:

"All right, if you want it, but how do we know this fellow sailed, anyhow? There are airplanes and railroads."

"Certainly, but it isn't likely he's using them. It must have been around two o'clock when he talked to Miss Graybourne. Even supposing he was all ready to depart, and counting half an hour to get to his point of departure, it would be nearer three in the morning, wouldn't it? That leaves just five hours in which to leave the United States. He might fly to Canada in that time, but the Latin flavor of him doesn't suggest Canada. Mexico and South America are far more than five hours air or railroad time if he was to be out of this country by eight."

"He could fly to New York, however—to embark there. . . . I hold out for a ship, Quill."

It was Phyllis Dent who offered her opinion now.

"Even so, one can hardly arrest a shipful of passengers, Mr. Latismer, and we haven't identified—"

"Quite logical, of course, but if we know the only ship our Mr. X. can be on, we have him fairly safe where he can't get away until we do identify him. And I am expecting information which will perhaps do just that."

"You mean?"

"I mean that our young friend Mr. Freeward may pick up some important material which he will telephone."

Cora Sue brightened at the mention of John Freeward's name, and exclaimed: "Oh, I do hope Johnny isn't hurt too badly."

"He's rather bungled up, but he'll mend, young lady. Now I think we can say that this interview is over—that is unless these Chanford officers insist on holding Miss Graybourne."

The sergeant from across the river had contributed little or nothing for the last thirty minutes, but he squirmed with pleasure as the famous District Attorney referred to him.

"Well, sir," he said, "since all this ties in with another case, I guess we can leave her in your hands; but we still got a murder—that watchman."

"Ah, yes, of course. But if you will consider Lieutenant Quill and myself sufficient security, I think you can safely let these young women return home. I promise you that if your watchman isn't cleared up today, they'll be quite ready to answer any summons."

"Well, if you say so, sir, I guess I got to let 'em go." And the two policemen departed, while the two young women, getting from their seats with visible relief, began thanking the District Attorney for his kindness and understanding.

CHAPTER IX

"MR. SICKLE will see you now, sir." John Freeward jumped at the sound of the voice. He had waited his hour in a small book-lined office of the State Department. Having hastened from the airport to Washington, having bribed a taxi-driver for extra speed to carry him, having waited almost thirty minutes before he had first been admitted to see this Mr. Sickle and present Mr. Latismer's note, this extra hour's delay had driven him almost frantic.

He followed the uniformed attendant into an elevator and aloft to Mr. Sickle's upstairs office. The man sat behind his unlit desk, smoking a pipe.

"WELL, young man, you've started something," were his first words. "I didn't know what I was in for when I mentioned the name of Maldochini at the Legation. Sit down. Sorry you had to wait but perhaps it has been worth it."

John sat down.

"Ever hear of the Buffa?" Sickle asked.

"No. What is it, an opera?"

"Not quite. It's an organized semi-political vendetta. The Fascist government is trying to stamp it out in Italy, but without much luck. When I mentioned Maldochini's name over there just now, the second undersecretary looked like a cat with a canary halfway down his throat. Apparently they've been expecting an investigation and hoping it wouldn't come. Anyhow, they're scared stiff—scared right out of diplomatic language. So they talked turkey."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, I'll have to prefix all this by saying that it's got to be unofficial. The State Department won't play ball with you and Latismer. Can't do it. To make official representations with the Italian government would be—well, diplomatic, to say the least. I'm sorry. I'd do a great deal for John Latismer. We were in the war together. I don't see him often, but I count him among my best friends. Besides which, this Maldochini murder seems to be raising a particular brand of hell in New York, and I'd like to help you clear it up."

"But I don't understand, sir."

"I suppose not. Put it this way. The Italian legation is convinced that Maldochini was murdered by a member of the Buffa. Apparently they thought so from the first time the news broke down here in Washington. But Maldochini is not any longer an Italian citizen. He was exiled and disgraced last summer. Officially the Italian government owes him no protection."

"Disgraced? Did you learn why?"

"More or less. There is a powerful anti-Fascist group in Italy still, and although he had been elevated to a good station in the State, he had been dealing with the opposition. Somebody gave him away, and the result was exile—official result, I mean.

"Now, this Buffa is a sort of unofficial Ogpu. It seems to be a bunch of fanat-

ical Fascists who have elected themselves to the job of purging enemies of the State, and it looks as though the Buffa had eliminated Signor Maldochini."

"Well, then why don't we—"

"Because the Italian government doesn't want it to come out that there still exists any organization so strong that it cannot be stamped out by the State. In other words, Italy is now a modern civilized country, and the fact that such a group as the Buffa could not only act to kill a man so well known as Maldochini, but could do it in a foreign country—well, it wouldn't look so well for their era of progress, would it?"

"I see—but that all seems very hypothetical."

"Not quite. The thing that has the legation down is the fact that a man known to be an agent of the Buffa arrived in New York two weeks ago. Apparently they don't know where he is, but they do know he's here. Now, if the American press got hold of this story and smeared it all over the country—as they would, naturally, then what happens to Italian tourist propaganda, and what happens to public opinion?"

JOHN was out of his element, but there seemed to be a lot of logic in the implication, and he nodded.

"Then you think—"

"I think the legation knows a lot more than they'll say. But I know the State department won't institute an investigation—not an official one. No use stirring up a strained relationship with a foreign office."

"But a crime like that—three crimes—"

"I know. It looks bad. But since the man wasn't an Italian subject, and since his government makes no protest—well, friendly foreign relations are worth more than the lives of a trio of musicians. Sounds cold-blooded, but that's the way things are. It's simply realism."

"Then what are we—what can I do?"

Mr. Sickle lifted his eyebrows.

"Ah, my boy, that's different. I told you that this is unofficial. I'm trusting you and Latismer to keep the newspapers out of it. But if I were you, I'd look for a man named Vampa—Jacoppo Vampa. I believe his visit over here is tied up with commerce, officially—metals, stamping- and rolling-mills, cold-rolled steel—something like that. Now that is absolutely all I can tell you. And mind you, after you leave here, I shall deny everything. I never heard of you in my life.

Clear? Well, good luck, young man. My regards to Latismser."

And as John Freeward walked down the steps of the State Building, he felt deadened, like a man dropped into a void. There was bitterness in his face as he sought the nearest telephone.

SMALL Dickie Dubbs, office boy to the District Attorney's staff, was a lad to know trouble when he saw it standing in front of him, and this bulky fellow who had just lurched through the door preceded, so to speak, by a barrage of alcoholic vapors, spelled trouble plainly enough for Dickie. Double trouble, in fact.

The man came in, his battered felt hat at an aggressive angle over an eye, weaving just a little and standing over Dickie's reception-desk like a human Tower of Pisa, as he said:

"Listen, brat, you go in and tell Latismser I want to see him *pronto*." Dickie was worried. Double trouble, double trouble!

"Yessir," he said politely, edging to the extremity of his seat. "But the D.A. is pretty busy right now, and—"

A heavy fist slammed down on his desk.

"Don't argue with me, brat. Latismser'll see me if I have to break up this office. Get going before I toss you out of the window, brat. The name is Peavey—Wellington Peavey."

And so Dickie Dubbs got going, but he was worried. For something, Dickie knew, had gone wrong with the D.A. He had appeared in the office that morning, all smiles, all graciousness, his usual energetic and faintly picturesque self. He had had conference after conference. There had even been some small gambling among the staff-members anent the probability of the great John Latismser, with a rabbit-out-of-hat gesture, solving the Maldochini case and once more covering himself with public praise to the confusion of the hostile newspapers.

And then had come a long-distance telephone-call; Dickie Dubbs himself had switched the call through. No one knew just what that call was about, but the effect of it on Mr. Latismser had been very evident. It had, in short, upset his usually well-governed temper. After that call he had verbally flayed Mr. Greffiths alive for a trivial error. He had shouted rudely at his secretary. He had slammed his office door, had locked it, and had informed Dickie at the desk that he didn't

want to see anybody, not even if it was the President or Hizzoner the Mayor. And when, just a few moments ago Mr. Latismser had telephoned in to discover if Mr. Dillion had returned to the office, learning that he had not yet come in, his language to Dickie, the innocent bearer of the news, was not only shocking, unfair and unprintable, but entirely unlike John Latismser.

Dickie knocked timidly. There was no answer. He tapped more loudly. A Vesuvian eruption of sulphurous words shook the door.

"What the blankety-blankety-blank did I say about leaving me alone, you blankety-blankety-blank?" But Dickie, in his uncomfortable posture between two dangers, stuck to his guns.

"I'm sorry, sir, but—but there's a man outside."

"Tell him I'm out. Tell him to go to hell. Tell him—"

"He insisted you'd see him, sir. His name is Peavey—Mr. Wellington Peavey. He seems to be just a little—"

"Then send him in, you little idiot!" came Latismser's voice through the door, and Dickie heard the lock slip as he ran off in bewilderment.

MR PEAVEY followed a zigzag course through the hall to Latismser's office. Dickie's ushering job done, he retreated to his receptionist's desk and murmured a prayer.

Mr. Peavey, once inside, stood waveringly, gazing at Latismser through inflamed eyes for several seconds before he said:

"There's one thing about you, Latismser. You *look* like a D.A. Got to hand it to you."

Latismser was in no mood for such talk.

"You're drunk, Peavey," he said. "Cut it short. I suppose you came here to tell me that your damned newspaper—"

"Whose damn' newspaper? I got no newspaper."

"I mean the *Chronicle*. I know who started that campaign to—"

Peavey slumped into a chair and waved a hand.

"Tha's what you think, Latismser. Now listen. I just quit the *Chronicle*. I jus' quit Barneveld cold. Tha's why I come down here to tell you. I jus'—"

But Latismser broke in:

"Get on with it, man. What are you trying to tell me? I'm in no state of mind for—"

"Awright, then shut up and lemme calm it. Where's that tadpole called Dillion?"

Mr. Latismser's most distinguishing characteristic was his ability to appear calm under adverse stress. "Dillion?" he inquired. "What has he to do with it? Why do you ask? Dillion is out, so far as I know. He left the office shortly before lunch-time. I presume he has some business in connection with—"

"I'll say he's got business, D.A. You wanna know where that pickle-puss stuffed shirt is right now? I'll tell you. Right now he's sitting in Cyrus Barneveld's big plush-lined office, smoking Havanas and selling you down the river. That's where he is."

Latismser gave the man an inquiring glance.

"Selling me—drunk or sober, that's an odd thing to say, Peavey. Just what do you imply?"

"ImPLY, nothing. I'm telling you straight. That secondhand rubber stamp of an assistant has got him a new set of ideas, Latismser. He wants your job, and he's cutting your throat to get it."

"Interesting," said Latismser, now convinced that the man was suffering from alcoholic delusions, "if true."

"It's damn' true."

"Then just why are you telling me? I was under the impression that your paper would be glad to see me out, Peavey. In fact, from a certain editorial, written by yourself—"

"Sure, I know. I'm a newspaper man, not a good Samaritan, Latismser. I don't owe you anything. It was my own idea to crack down on you—not particularly because I've got anything against you, but because it made the kind of news people like to read. But that is all part of the game. You like to play prima donna, and you take your chance. Personally, I think you're all right. Maybe you aren't the best D.A. in the world, but you're pretty good. And I wouldn't be a party to sticking you in the back and shoving that crumb called Dillion in your job, Latismser. Not me, I wouldn't. And that's why I quit cold on old Cyrus T. Barneveld."

LATISMser's frown was a puzzled one. "You quit the *Chronicle*? When?"

"Half an hour ago. Five whiskies ago. I quit when I left Barneveld and this Dillion practically necking and getting ready to make a monkey out of you in the Maldochini case."

"The Maldochini case!" That single name brought the discouragement back into Latismser's soul again. "Just what is it you're trying to tell me, Peavey?"

"Kinda interests you now, eh? Okay, sit back and relax while I tell you."

And for a quarter of an hour or more Peavey recounted the facts of Dillion's visit to the *Chronicle* office.

WHEN he had finished Latismser was thoughtful.

"A pretty fantastic story, Peavey. Suppose it's true that Dillion, taking advantage of my absence, has stumbled on a clue—if it is a clue. Why have you told me this? What is to prevent me from including this material in my own activities and taking the lead away from Dillion? Besides, Dillion is no fool. Why would he show his hand so quickly, before Barneveld signed such an agreement with him?"

"Why not? He holds a document, doesn't he? And you can't prove anything without it. You could work up his case for him but in the end it would be Dillion who produced the evidence."

"Even so—even if he can prove that Yvonne Blanchamps was really Maldochini's wife and that he willed money to her as such, all it does is to make her a bigamist and a pretty hard case—which we know already, for that matter. It doesn't prove murder."

"No, but it sets up circumstances which a jury would convict her on—especially now she's dead. You know juries."

"Possibly. And then how would you account for her death?"

"Ambin, of course. Either he found out she was married to Maldochini, or he was just plain jealous—a rabbit with hydrophobia."

"All theoretical, isn't it? And who killed Ambin?"

"Nobody has proved he was killed yet, have they? Call it heart-failure."

Latismser paced his office. Finally he stopped and faced the newspaper man.

"It won't wash, Peavey. Unless somebody can produce a pistol with Yvonne Blanchamps' fingerprints on it, and evidence that it was fired by her from some point in Vanderstitt Hall, you can't get a conviction—not even a posthumous one. And listen, Peavey: I have plenty of evidence, myself, to show that she didn't do it, because I can almost prove somebody else did—almost is not the word: I can just about conclusively prove it—only—"

His voice took on a tired note here, and he resumed, after a pause:

"Only, I can't."

Peavey stared at him "Now," he asked, "who's talking in circles?"

Latismer slumped in his seat and nodded gloomily.

"I know," he said. "I had an hypothesis—a sound one. There is a great deal more to it than I've said. A lot of things have happened that you don't know, Peavey. Things that prove conclusively that the man who shot Maldochini, and probably La Blanchamps too, is a hundred miles out in the Atlantic Ocean right now. And I can't do anything about it."

Peavey wrinkled his nose. "Interesting," he said in his turn, "if true."

"It's true, all right. Fantastically true. I almost wish it were not. I almost wish something could establish this poison theory, incredible as it is. For instance, if this man Ambin did not die of natural causes—oh, well, that seems out of the question. But I want to thank you for coming here, Peavey. I had no idea that our friend Dillion was so ambitious. However, it doesn't matter now. Let him peddle his information to Barneveld. The worst that can happen is that the *Chronicle* will be out on the same limb that I've been on. Barneveld will start something he can't finish—nobody can."

The telephone tinkled on Latismer's desk. The D.A. lifted the receiver and spoke wearily. Then, in a gesture of absolute astonishment, he dropped the instrument with a clatter.

"What's that?" he shouted, retrieving it. Then after a moment he hung up and stared at Peavey like a man dazed from a blow.

"Ambin!" he said, as though he could only say that one word. "Ambin!"

"Huh? What about him?"

"Poisoned. Autopsy report—seems decisive: poisoned. That tears it."

JOHN FREEWARD sat at the soda-fountain of the airport's waiting-hall, trying to regain his courage. Three empty glasses littered the counter in front of him, and he made a wry effort at tearing his mind away from the discouragement and fear which beset him, by toying idly with the soda-straws. He had built a miniature log cabin on the marble counter while the clerk, fussing with sandwiches at the other end, frowned at him disapprovingly. His plane was due to



depart at five o'clock and there remained still fifteen minutes of this intolerable waiting-time. The feeling of failure sat heavily upon him. The only relief was what Mr. Latismer had told him over the phone after he had reported his discouraging news.

"Don't worry about Miss Graybourne, John," he had said. "She's safe and sound—had a bad experience, but she's all right now. No time to go into that, but I wanted you to know."

As if a man can hear that the girl he loves has gone through a "bad experience" and let it go at that!

BY splitting a straw and using the cleft to hold a ridgepole, he found he could put a peak roof on his log cabin. Windows were too much of a problem, however, and he soon gave up that attempt. Besides, the soda-clerk was growing more indignant at the wanton waste of straws. . . . The hell of it was that feeling of rebuff and failure. Latismer had expected him to get results, not excuses. . . . The little cabin of straws was like a pre-revolutionary blockhouse. No, rather a bamboo house in the jungle. Headhunters all around—you could shoot through the apertures when they attack. Queer how such ideas will come to you when really you're worried sick and disgusted. . . . But the headhunters can shoot through the apertures, too. . . . Poison-arrows. . . . Blowpipes.

He made a miniature blowpipe out of a soda-straw and blew a broken match-stick at the cabin. It was very realistic. Too much so for the soda-clerk, who winked at the little group of people sitting at the counter watching the antics of this quite evidently drunken young man.

But the match-stick was too light and lost balance and instinctively John looked for a pin in the masculine pin-cushion of his lapel. And then he remembered. From his wallet he took out the broken bit of needle or steel tube or whatever, with its oddly glued-on thread. He stuck the thing in his straw and blew it. It carried well, straight as an arrow, and its force was enough to knock down the tiny cabin onto the marble counter.

He stared at what he had done. . . . Suddenly he let out a shout.

A hidden loud-speaker was blaring out the announcement that the next plane was ready to receive passengers and would take off in five minutes.

And the knot of soda-drinkers, smilingly observing the antics of this pre-occupied young alcoholic, were startled and amazed to see him all but leap across the counter to retrieve what looked like a common pin, hearing him shout, shamelessly and without restraint;

"By God, that's it! *That's got to be it!*"

After which this young madman seized an entire handful of soda-straws and made a frantic dash for the runway where passengers for the plane were already hurrying to the field.

The soda-clerk gave a little sigh of relief and winked at his customers.

"Nuts!" he said. "Just nuts, he is."

FAST as airplanes are, not even they have the speed to keep abreast of the human mind, once it gets afire. Dark had long since fallen when John's plane deposited him at the airport. In his taxicab, he tried to soften the fatigue of his furious thinking by turning on the radio. The strains of swing and the chatter of a recorded advertisement annoyed him, however, and he was about to shut the thing off again, when the announcer proclaimed:

"We interrupt Ben Aielmann's perpetual band to bring you a flash bulletin from the Intercity Press Association concerning the country's most baffling crime—"

The words arrested Freeward's fingers at the button.

"Announced this evening by the police department that the death of Basile Ambin, member of the Masterpiece Symphony Orchestra and husband of the singer Yvonne Blanchamps, who died in jail last Tuesday night, succumbed to a violent and rare poison, and did not, as originally reported, die of heart-failure. This startling announcement comes upon the heels of another printed in the *Chronicle* this evening, to the effect that that newspaper is prepared to announce the name of Signor Maldochini's murderer should the police not have obtained a conviction by next Monday morning. For further details see your Intercity newspapers."

And as the strains of swing began their raucous moaning once more, John

leaned toward the driver's window and rapped sharply.

"I'll give you an extra five if you can make the address I gave you in thirty minutes flat from here. Step on it, for God's sake."

And the chauffeur, with a leer replied:

"Okay, buddy, for a fiver we sprout wings. Hold everything."

IT was nine o'clock when John Freeward reached his little flat. Once at the head of his own stairs and fumbling in the lock with his key, he thought only of getting to the telephone to let Mr. Latismor know of his return and to urge him to come post-haste. But when he dialed the number and waited for some response from the District Attorney's office, came the metallic voice of a central operator informing him: "Your party does not answer; shall I call you in twenty minutes?"

He said a fervent "Damn." On a second inspiration he reached for the phone again, but his gesture was interrupted by a knock at his door. Crossing and opening, he found the bearded figure of Mr. Peter Wengalle standing there with a glinting monocle focused at him.

"Where the devil have you been, old chap? I've been on your wire for two hours or so—had a bit of a word for you. Thought I'd drop in and pick you up. We'll be in plenty of time to call on your charming fiancée before I leave. Am I asked in?"

"Leave?" John's mind made an effort in reverse and forcefully recalled their half-promise to see Wengalle off that evening.

"Oh, of course," he said. "But I—I'm afraid things have—"

Wengalle's big body filled a chair.

"Can't make it after all? No matter, though I'm truly sorry, at that. But—well, I had a queer flash of memory. Probably nothing at all, still—I—well, I thought I'd try my idea out on you. Might be something in it."

John was puzzled at the man's unusually hesitant manner. He said, without much enthusiasm:

"I'm dull tonight—you said a flash of memory?"

Wengalle sprawled out in a chair and lighted his pipe.

"The other night, you know, at that place . . . Spinelli's or Spingarn's or—something quite spinal. Well, there was that waiter, remember? The one with the Adam's apple in profile—some odd

story about him. He played in the Masterpiece, I believe."

"Oh, you mean Cora Sue's panhandler? That's right, he played the oboe. He had some story about Maldochini."

"Exactly. I said at the time that he looked familiar, remember? Well, dash it all, it's come to me. That fellow's a double for Raspucci."

"Raspucci?"

"But of course, Benedetto Raspucci. Ah, but you wouldn't know about him. Great name in musical circles, Raspucci. Mystery, too. He had a little orchestra in Florence—played nothing but his own music, which was—well, it had a quality. Music for musicians, but the critics all thought the man was a genius—a Sibelius or a Richard Strauss or even another Debussy. Queer sort of fish, he was. Refused public honors and wouldn't be interviewed, and practically starved to death. Then one day he vanished—just dropped out. There was a report he was dead."

"But what has all that to do with the—"

"With our waiter? Perhaps nothing at all, but—well, it isn't likely that there would be *two* Italians with that same formation of the larynx, eh? Damme, but I'd swear this waiter fellow is Benedetto Raspucci, if the thing were possible. And the other coincidence is his playing the oboe. Raspucci played it. Hobby with him. And by the way, he's composed two sonatas and a concerto for oboe, which is a rarity in itself."

WENGALLE'S attention was arrested at the look on John Freeward's face, but he did not quite understand it.

"Damn' queer, isn't it?" he demanded puffingly.

John spoke very slowly: "It's queerer than you think. Did you know that this waiter calls himself Ben Rasp?"

"By Jove!"

"It's a fact. And he got his job in the Masterpiece because Maldochini recognized him as having played in some Italian orchestra."

"Fantastic! Ironical, too, because Raspucci had Maldochini in his orchestra—first violin. And when the late but not lamented maestro published that 'Cain' thing, and won the national subsidy prize for it, all the critics and musicians thought Raspucci should have had it instead. Made an unpleasant situation. Raspucci dropped out, about then. Story is, he was heartbroken—one of

those sentimental and probably absurd pieces of journalism. Now, I—"

"Wait," said John Freeward. "Wait a minute, Wengalle. Let me think. Maybe you've got something there; maybe it's— No, of course that's absurd. But listen: perhaps you can help me figure out something even more insane than that. How much time have you?"

"Two hours or so. Why?"

JOHN FREEWARD held up a hand to warn Wengalle he must wait and look and say nothing. Then he drew two or three soda-straws from his pocket, took a common pin from his dresser, jerked a piece of wool yarn from a ragged old sweater in his wardrobe, and proceeded to behave in a way which, to Wengalle, was nothing short of mysterious. He tied a piece of yarn about an inch long to the head end of the pin. He thrust the pin into a straw and retreated to the end of the room, where he stood facing Wengalle.

"You are now playing the rôle of *William Tell's* little boy, Wengalle—but the role is slightly confused with that of a guinea pig. Hold out your right arm."

Wengalle cocked his monocle in amazement, but did as instructed.

Zip! John blew the end of the straw, and a silver streak flashed from straw to the Englishman's arm.

Wengalle winced.

"Hi!" he shouted. "What the devil kind of a game is this, man? That stings." He was about to remove the tiny dart, but Freeward called to him to leave it alone. Hurrying to examine the pin, he found it buried deep in the thick tweed of Wengalle's coat.

"Look and see if it left a mark or drew blood," he asked the Englishman. But apparently the point had not penetrated flesh.

"I say, would you mind telling me what in thunder you're doing? You seem otherwise sane enough, you know."

"I'm sane enough. I've had a mad brain-wave, though, which may have more to it than it would appear—if you'll answer my questions."

"I'm not much on toy blowpipes, but fire away."

"Well, what instruments are nearest the conductor in a symphony orchestra?"

"Eh? That's an odd one. It would depend on the orchestra, of course. Symphony groups are pretty flexible these days. But the classical arrangement would put the first violins in a block at

the conductor's left, with the second fiddles and violas at his right. Then, behind them, but in sort of a center block in the horseshoe, come the 'cellos, and the wood-winds behind them in ditto. Why? Just what's behind all this, Freedom?"

John shook his head.

"Nothing but a silly hunch, I'm afraid—only—well, I stumbled onto this trick of blowing a pin—you know, poisoned arrows in blowpipes from Borneo, and that sort of thing. And I—well, if Maldochini were poisoned after all, and nobody but the players were near him, then it *might* be a clue to the way the poison was stuck in him. If it were stuck in him. Besides, I found a queer thing that has been laughed at by everybody, but which hangs in my mind as—oh, hell, of course it's silly."

Wengalle frowned.

"You mean—you mean you had some idea that one of the players blew a poisoned dart to kill the maestro while playing? Isn't that a little—well, far-fetched?"

"This whole case is far-fetched. Mr. Latismier—he's our District Attorney, you know—he had the thing all solved, only—well, I can't tell that story. But his solution depended on a shooting, and now that Ambin has been shown to be poisoned, it all comes back again to the probability of poisoning. Dr. Muth, the toxicologist, mentioned curare. That's a South American blow-pipe poison."

"Yes, but he admitted that curare wouldn't be strong enough, if I remember what the papers said."

"But he said some poison *like* curare, only stronger."

"And asserted that nobody could get such a poison."

"I know. It's all confused, and I'm a fool to try to figure it out when even the experts can't begin to. . . . Still, that blowpipe idea . . . you saw yourself what a pin blown out of a straw can do. Look at this."

He took the mysterious bit of broken steel from his lapel, handling it gingerly, and showed it to Wengalle.

"Careful. It's just possible it's loaded with some fancy poison, at that. I wouldn't want to get a scratch from it."

Wengalle held the fragment in his hand, while John told him how he happened to find it, and mentioned Cora Sue's finding of another similar piece.

"I admit it's queer; still—"

"I had a hope that some instrument in the orchestra could act as a blowpipe—something like that," said John.

Wengalle grinned. "Novelesque, that. Unfortunately, wind instruments are all too big. It would take a thin tube like your soda-straw."

"And the blower would have to be no further than twenty feet away," John added. "And even so—that pin didn't break the skin, did it? I hoped it would when I shot you with it, just now. Oh, well, I guess I'd better forget it."

Wengalle was suddenly thoughtful.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "Wait just a minute, my friend. Perhaps you've really got an idea there after all. Listen to this: Of all the instruments in an orchestra, the only one which possesses a thin tube is the oboe. The *oboe!* Does that intrigue you?"

JOHN stared. Wengalle picked up a pencil and reached for a sheet of paper on John's desk and began drawing a diagram. A longitudinal cross-cut of the oboe, he showed, pictures an instrument made of a wooden tube ending in a bell, but blown by a smaller metal tube which contains the reed.

"That little tube isn't more than three-sixteenths or a quarter-inch thick," said Wengalle. "But it's about three inches long—not long enough to serve as a blowpipe, unfortunately."

"Besides, the oboe is a wood-wind, isn't it? And by your own statement, the wood-winds are behind the cellos—too far from the conductor."

Wengalle was excited now.

"Not necessarily!" he almost shouted. "That's the classical arrangement, of course. But this is Maldochini—*Maldochini*, mind you—that clown of a conductor is famous for shifting his players into all sorts of experimental positions. By Jove, I remember now, it was that Bloc thing, wasn't it? '*Une Prière.*' He changed his men for the second movement. The wood-winds were almost in front of him at his right. That was on account of the oboe part with the flute background. C-minor—three flats."

"You mean the oboes were—within range?"

"Call it that. There were four oboes within ten feet of the man. Gets an effect that way. Shoves the second fiddles and violas back to the second tier—probably on account of the microphone. This radio broadcasting has done a lot to orchestras."

John was excited, but his excitement died as he said almost ruefully:

"That's all very well, but we're going off into far-away dimensions. You just said that the reed tube of an oboe is only three inches long. Besides, wouldn't the reed stop the air-flow? And doesn't the oboe—I mean isn't it held so that it points *down*? It doesn't aim at the conductor."

"It could. Listen, my friend, fantastic as it is, and all but impossible, I believe you're on to something. Look here, if this oboist of yours turns out to be Raspucci—damme, the coincidence is too much. It's got to have a meaning."

John needed only that. He stepped to his telephone and dialed a number as he said to Wengalle:

"Well, that settles it, Wengalle. You aren't going tonight. You've got me worked into a sweat, and I'll need you to testify. Better have 'em hold passage for you. You'll stay, won't you?"

But before the Englishman could reply, John was talking into his telephone.

"Hello—Homicide? I want Quill; is he there? Well, put him on. Find him and let me talk to him; dammit, this is important." And after a long pause he spoke again:

"Quill? This is John Freeward. Listen: have you still got those instruments tied up under seal? I mean the Master-piece Symphony. Yes? Well, then, you'd better get over to Vanderstitt Hall and meet me right off. For God's sake, stop arguing; this is big. Get there and bring along Dr. Bankler and his whole laboratory. We're going to break the Maldochini case wide open."

Then he slammed the receiver to shut off the violent protest that vibrated over the wire.

CHAPTER X

MR. PETER WENGALLE was puzzling over the instrument as he spoke. He had already tried blowing through the little tube at its smaller end, but had produced no musical sound. He had pulled it apart at its joints and stood there staring at the long brass tube which protruded through the upper into the lower section, as he said guardedly:

"Well, gentlemen, if you are looking for oddities, here is one. It looks like an oboe. It is built like an oboe. In short, it *has been* an oboe; but it isn't capable of playing music now."

Lieutenant Quill challenged:

"What you mean? Aint them two tooters exactly the same?"

Wengalle looked surprised.

"A child could see they're not."

"Yeah? Well maybe cops are dumber than kids. Anyhow, they look alike to me."

"This one has no reed, Lieutenant. You can see for yourself that a brass tube has been inserted into the short tube of the mouthpiece, or reed-holder."

"What for?"

"I can't give expert testimony on that." Wengalle's smile was ironical. "But suppose you ask Mr. Freeward. I fancy he has an enlightening idea."

FREEWARD was already taking the strange instrument from the Englishman's hand.

"Will you play guinea pig once more?" he asked Wengalle; and the critic stepped down the room some ten paces. John turned to the others, holding out his hand.

"What I've got here is a common pin with a piece of black yarn tied to it. Keep your eye on it a minute." He thrust the pin into the oboe's mouthpiece, aimed it, blew it—and saw the tiny dart bury itself in Wengalle's sleeve.

"There you are, Lieutenant," he said with a gesture. "That inserted tube makes a nice little blowgun—nearly two feet of it in there. What we are trying to show you is that if that pin were a hollow needle loaded with some fast and deadly poison—"

Quill snorted. "You wouldn't be trying to tell me that a pin would make a hole like a .22 bullet, son?" he said.

"Naturally not. Leave the bullet wound out of this for a while. We'll take that up when we come to it."

"Then what?"

"I say that poison could be shot through this gadget."

"I say you're crazy."

"Then why would the owner of this oboe have taken the trouble to fix up an expensive instrument so that it wouldn't make a sound? And why bring it into a concert with an important orchestra?"

"How would I know? I aint a musician, thank God! Maybe he just did it to make a monkey out of us."

"And if they show a poison was in that needle I showed you, then what?"

"Then—oh, hell, Feeny, you check me that oboe—oh the list and find out which one of those players owns it."



The officer addressed replied:

"I already done that, Chief. There's four oboists and five oboes here. This one, and the one in that case, belong to a feller named Rasp."

Wengalle and Freeward stared at each other. John said to Quill:

"Remember the player who said he was also a soda-jerker in a drug-store when I butted into your examination that night? His name was Ben Rasp, Lieutenant. Maldochini gave him his job. He works at a drug-store on—"

"Feeney," snapped Quill. "Go pick that feller up and bring him down here."

John shook his head.

"Better wait until you're more convinced, Quill. Here is Doctor Bankler and the other one. Let's hear them first. I don't want to have you think I'm making a monkey out of you."

DR. BANKLER wore a puzzled expression as he stepped into the little room. "Where did you get that broken hypo-needle, Quill?" he wanted to know. Quill jerked his thumb toward Freeward and briefly told the Doctor of the circumstances, adding: "What you find out?"

"Whoever held that thing in his hand for a minute has been risking his life. There is probably enough poison left on that needle to kill ten men in a few minutes. It's—why, man, it's unbelievable."

"What poison?"

Dr. Bankler shook his head.

"I'm not at all sure. I would say alkaloid derivative—possibly of curare. Its reactions resemble curare but infinitely stronger. I've called Dr. Muth, who will give his opinion on our somewhat hasty analysis. Whatever it is, precisely, it is a terrible poison. And"—he gave Quill a quick flash of his eye—"it conclusively proves my original contention that Maldochini was poisoned. You can write that down, Quill. Doubtless it goes for Ambin too. It only remains to show how an hypodermic injection could have been administered while Ambin was held in jail. But that is a police matter, and no concern of mine."

Quill appeared to meditate. Then he asked: "How much of this poison is needed to kill, Doc?"

"I can't answer that. Dr. Muth will doubtless be able to give you an opinion, but it is outside of my scope, Quill. However, unofficially, of course, I might venture a guess that even a microscopic quantity of this poison might cause a muscular paralysis of the heart, due to paralysis of the nerve centers. I said it was curare-like, once it enters the bloodstream."

"Call it heart-failure?"

"In layman's language that might serve. Scientifically, of course—"

"Never mind, Doc. I give in. I been cockeyed about this whole case, and I admit it. Only, I still don't see how come we take a bullet out of a feller's head and then prove he was poisoned. I never heard of a double-action murder, only in story books."

Freeward offered a note at this point.

"I think, Lieutenant," he said, "that there is a pretty simple explanation of that: Mr. Latismer could give you some information along those lines, I fancy. What seems so confusing is the fact that we have been faced with two crimes instead of one. The confusion lies in the fact that one occurred just a matter of minutes ahead of the other. However—well, I'll save it for the D.A."

"Arrrh!" Quill plainly disliked the idea of more mystery, but let it go at that. He started barking orders as he got his overcoat on:

"Feeney, go bring in that soda-jerker. Pick up the boss up there, too—Spinel himself, if that's his name. And you, Freeward, you get the D.A. on the phone. Doc, bring Muth down there with his testimony. I'm gonna see this case finished if it takes all night!"

CHAPTER XI

CORA SUE was crying. Even John Freeward felt a hurting in him as he sat there watching the disintegration of a man. Shriveled and collarless, Ben Rasp looked like a sickly ghost of the waiter who had served hundreds of sandwiches to Cora Sue. Not that the man bore any visible sign of physical violence, but he was deadened and dulled as though some vital organism had gone out of him.

The tears gathered unashamed in Cora Sue's eyes, and she held John's hand tightly, whispering:

"I—I can't believe it. I simply can't believe poor Ben could be a murderer."

John nodded. "I know. God, but I wish he wouldn't *look* like that!"

The prisoner's high forehead, and over-large eyes in their deep sockets burning under it, gave him the look of a Christian martyr, somehow. He stood there with his arms pathetically folded to conceal the handcuffs, limp and weak. He had stubbornly refused to speak, too, despite the shouting and ranting of Detective Quill, and the more gentle if more probing persistence of Mr. Latismer.

"Might as well make a clean breast of it, Rasp," the District Attorney was saying. "We have plenty of proof that you poisoned the maestro and Ambin. We have at least one of those needles, and your oboe with the tube in it, and we know that your employer at the drug-store had that curine in a cabinet. Come now, tell us why you did it. You aren't a criminal. You're sane enough. You must have had a reason."

But the thin, pale face remained without expression.

PETER WENGALLE was seen to speak into Latismer's ear. The District Attorney looked up at him doubtfully but shrugged as much as to say, "Well, I don't believe it, but you can try." Then Wengalle spoke in bristling Italian.

Rasp was caught by surprise. His eyes had a startled look in them. Suddenly he collapsed, slumped in his chair and buried his face in his handcuffed arms. Wengalle went on, changing to English now:

"So you see, there is no good in hiding it now. I guessed it sometime ago. I was a correspondent in Rome in 1919, and I think I knew every musical figure in Italy, Raspucci, by sight at least."

"Ah, ma, *perdio, sono perduto-perduto!*" the man murmured. But he drew himself stiffly up once more, and faced the Englishman with:

"*Raspucci? Que vuol dire signor? E morte, Raspucci, come sa tutto il mondo. Dico la verita.*"

"That's useless, my friend," said Wengalle, keeping to English now. "And if you persist in it, you can only expect the police to investigate it completely. They'll find out—be sure of it. Right now it is a waiter named Ben Rasp on trial for murder. The memory of Benedetto Raspucci is the recollection of a great artist. Do you want that memory to be stained with crime? This is your last chance, my friend. Tell the truth, and the name of Raspucci can be kept

from the press—can be kept clean and bright."

A strange look came into the man's eyes suddenly, and he nodded slowly and began speaking like a man in a trance. "*Bene,*" he said. "It is true, then. The soul of Raspucci is already dead. Only the body can die now, signor."

THERE was absolute silence in the room as the man spoke on. He told a story to pluck at the heartstrings of everyone who heard it. Even the hard face of Lieutenant Quill softened. Falteringly, brokenly, in stilted English, he told of his struggles as a young musician, of a small orchestra composed of his personal friends who had believed in him as a composer, who played without hope of reward, starving, grateful for crumbs. He told of minor success, of passionate labor to bring to life a symphonic composition upon which he had labored for years. He told how he had taken in a starving violinist named Rosso, given him a portion of his own frugal sustenance, shared with him a garret, allowed him to aid in the orchestration of his great composition. He told how, one day, he had been stricken with an illness and confined to his room, and how, unable to pay the small sum required for rent, he was driven from his garret and thrown upon the kindness of friends as poor as he. His small orchestra, he said, was conducted during his illness by this Rosso, whose mannerisms and gallery-playing won him some considerable following.

And then, he said, this Rosso deserted the cause of pure art to accept a position in another city, promising to send funds to his deserted friends in Florence. And when he, Raspucci, was able to resume his work once more, he found that his precious manuscript had disappeared. He had tried to find Rosso, thinking that perhaps his friend had put it in some safe place when they had been evicted from their little garret, but Rosso had vanished.

A few months later all Italy was startled by the triumph of a new composer-conductor whose composition, submitted with thousands of others for a national award, had won the prize and national acclaim. That man's name had been Giuseppe Maldochini. And when Raspucci, with a few saved lire, paid admission to hear a performance of the National Symphony Orchestra when it came to Florence and played a première of

Maldochini's "Retribution of Cain," Raspucci had recognized the conductor as that same Rosso whom he had befriended, and the composition as the work of his own fevered, starving but passionately creative brain.

"And what can I do, signore?" he demanded. "To prove such a theft, it is not possible. Perhaps with money, in the courts, yes; but this Maldochini, was he not then elected to the Academy? And one does not, signore, cry 'Thief!' when what has been stolen is from the soul."

The rest was commonplace—a story of emigration to America, of starvation, of refusal to treat music as being on the level with a trade, refusing to join a musicians' union, and because of this, being forced to do what he could to earn a living.

Working for two years at the drugstore, he had often given a hand to the pharmacists and had been entrusted with the keys of some of the cabinets containing drugs. He had long ago noticed a small vial which was marked in hand-written ink, "*Mr. Spinel, private. Deadly poison. Aug. 3, 1921.*" When he had seen the newspaper announcement of Maldochini's coming visit to America, he had taken some of this dangerous liquid, sensing that the bottle had been forgotten long since. The idea of using a blowpipe had not occurred to him until one day Maldochini had taken a sandwich in the drugstore, and perhaps fearing trouble from the man whose very life he had destroyed, had pretended friendship, had given him a chance to play in his orchestra.

LATISMER called on Mr. Spinel, an aged gentleman who looked terrified through his corpulence, and could scarcely speak above a whisper.

"How does it happen that you possessed such a deadly drug in your place?" he wanted to know. "I understand that there are strict laws governing—"

"Ja, dot's right; but I forget it already, it is so long ago now," he admitted. He told of his earlier studies as a chemist, and his aspiration to make a fortune out of patent medicines. In Europe, he stated, patent medicines for the purpose of relaxing the nervous system had sometimes employed the deadly curare, which at that time had not been ruled illegal in America. Privately in his own laboratory he had manufactured a small quantity of the derivative, curine,

planning to utilize it microscopically in some such way, but the pharmacopoeia excluded the substance before he was able to continue, and the bottle remained for years at the back of a forgotten shelf, while his drug business assumed more modern tendencies, instituting soda-fountains and sandwich-bars instead of pharmaceutical laboratories.

It was Quill, however, who produced the one question which was needed to make the entire structure clear:

"Now what I don't see," he said, "is how that gadget of yours worked. One of them needles will blow out of it, all right, but it don't have force enough to break the skin. And the Doc says that stuff won't kill unless—"

BEN RASP was still holding his head down and fumbling nervously with his hands. He spoke in a mutter now, using Italian. He seemed to be ignoring the existence of all those people, his eyes fixed upon his knuckles.

Peter Wengalle acted as extempore interpreter.

"He says that he had been shooting those things into the maestro's clothes for several days,—every rehearsal, as a matter of fact,—knowing that sooner or later Maldochini would lean against something and press the point of one of them into his skin. Apparently he must have done so on the platform that night."

"Okay," said Quill when he had digested that. "And now there's one thing we aint touched on that—oh, hell, I can't get it out of my head that this Maldochini had a bullet in his head. Nobody can just laugh that off. How about it, D.A.? Somebody must have shot that bullet."

Latismser seemed prepared for that.

"Since it's obviously impossible to murder an already dead body, I doubt if any grand jury would bring an indictment on that count," he said. "Technically, Maldochini was dead before that shot was fired."

"Well, who fired it?"

"Two other parties planned the maestro's murder. I can prove that, but I'll do it—privately. For the benefit of the gentlemen of the press, however, let me say that one of those parties was Yvonne Blanchamps, the singer."

"The hell you say! She was his—"

"His wife," said Latismser calmly. A stir followed. "She was the wife of Giuseppe Rosso—*alias* Giuseppe Maldochini. We have a certificate to show

that. Furthermore, by his will, she would have benefited to the extent of twenty-five thousand American dollars by his death. He had that much tucked away in a Boston bank, where no foreign government could expropriate it."

"Huh?"

"He was deprived of citizenship and his property confiscated last summer. He was guilty of an act which, in dictator countries, is a political crime. And for reasons which I can only explain privately, a certain group of persons whose name I am not at liberty to mention—also for excellent reasons—carried vengeance for this political crime to America."

"You mean the Italian Gov—"

"Not at all. Expressly not. A group of private nature unsponsored by the Government. What I cannot prove, but what seems likely, is that Yvonne Blanchamps helped them plan Maldochini's death—for her own purposes."

"Well, that will take some proving."

"I admit that. Still, Miss Graybourne has kindly come down here tonight to repeat her testimony that she saw La Blanchamps enter a certain box at Vanderstitt Hall just prior to the shooting. We can only conclude that it was her knowledge of the musical score that helped to time that shot to a moment when it could not be heard above the orchestra. However, since Miss Blanchamps cannot be brought to trial—"

"But Ambin killed her on account—"

"Not necessarily. It is quite as likely that he had followed her for other reasons. After all, she was *his* wife—illegally, as it proved, but I doubt if he knew that. I prefer to believe that—those persons unmentioned—felt that Miss Blanchamps knew too much of their movements. I fancy Ambin only witnessed the stabbing, or got there just too late."

"Then who killed Ambin?"

"Since Ambin shared a small apartment with Rasp, and possibly knew considerable about his movements, and since Rasp was one of the three players who visited Ambin in his cell—well, perhaps our prisoner can help you there."

EYES turned upon the huddled figure of Rasp, who now sat motionless in a chair, his arms dangling limply; but the man did not move nor speak. Quill shouted at him. Wengalle spoke sharply in Italian. Then someone cried:

"God a'mighty! He's dead!"

Dr. Bankler scurried to the figure in the chair, lifted the face, then turned to the officials with a curious gesture.

"Exit," he said, "the prisoner!"

He bent over the dead man, picked up a limp hand and stared at it, then picked up the other. Then he said:

"Quite simple, that. I see a bit of cotton tucked under one fingernail, and a tiny cut on a knuckle of the other hand—likely a half-healed wound. Draw blood with that fingernail—and that cotton under it—" He shrugged eloquently. "I fancy we have another interesting item for Dr. Muth and his laboratory. However, it is certain, at least, that the prisoner will never be brought to trial."

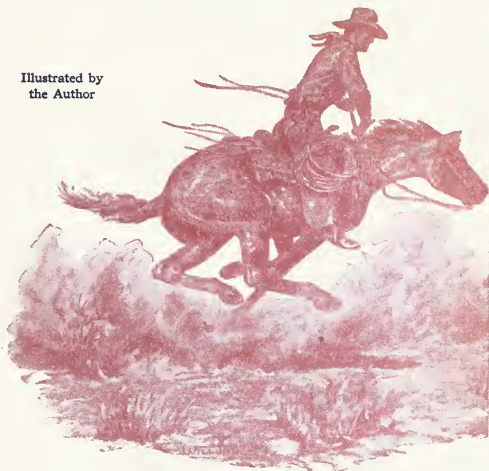
THE folding of the ancient and honorable journal, the *Chronicle*, just three days after the closing of the Maldochini case, is common history now. The business-journal version mentioned badly balanced financial sheets and employed topheavy phrases which, had the public not had other things to think of, might have been puzzling. But in the world of newspaper men, who have a flair for such things, the two facts were looked upon as simple cause and effect. "Barneveld," they whispered, "must have bought himself a gold brick. Bet you this feller Peavey knows what it's all about."

For nearly a week after its solution the Maldochini case still made copy, and even when it vanished from Page One and then drifted out of the public eye, to be replaced by war news and fresher, newer murders, there was a small but significant item to be read in the "Town Crier" column of one of the *Chronicle's* old rival papers. This columnist put it:

"It may be just a hunch, but your simple reporter, getting a report that the assistant D.A., Clarence Dillion, has resigned his office due to a breakdown, to be replaced by the late Judge Ellison Freeward's only son John, whose brand-new wife, the former Cora Sue Graybourne, was a witness in the Maldochini fiasco, wonders whether all has been sweetness and light in one of our most important public offices, these last few weeks. Young Freeward is a pleasant fellow, and we both congratulate him and wish him luck, mentioning that we had nothing personal against retiring Mr. Dillion, although our praise shall be faint indeed."

Another book-length novel, "Exiles of Time," by Nelson S. Bond, will appear in the next—the May—issue.

Illustrated by
the Author



The famous author of "The Drifting Cowboy," "Smoky" and "Big Enough" gives us a vivid recollection of hard-riding days.

HIPPY was this night horse's name. He'd been named that before he was broke, for on account of getting jammed against the heavy gate log of a corral while going through too fast a hip was caved in. It was some months later when he was run in again, and even though he looked some lop-sided with the caved-in hip, it didn't seem to hinder him in his action. There wasn't a limp nor even a catch in his gait, but figuring that he wouldn't do for a long ride he was broke for use as a night horse.

What we call a night horse is one we ride on "night guard," in holding a herd of cattle which is to be moved on to other ranges or shipped to market. With most of the big outfits the night horse is used on night guard only, for there's a herd to be held most every night, sometimes the year around. The herd is worked over (culled out) during the day as different ranges are reached, and replaced by others from the day's round-ups, so there's a herd to keep guard on, day and night. It's called a main herd or *manada*.

The riders take shifts in holding the herd. During the day, three or four riders take on an average of six-hour shifts loose-herding the herd to grazing while the other riders go on circle, rounding up more stock in the surrounding country. The day-herd shift comes on an average of every two or three days for each rider, depends on the amount of riders the outfit has and the size of the herd and kind of cattle that's being held. No cowboy likes day herding, for you're not supposed to go to sleep on the job and there's seldom enough to do to keep you from doing just that.

But on night guard, when the herd is close-herded, every rider takes his two-hour shift regular and every night, and it might sound sort of queer, but few seem to mind that as much as day-herd, nor the break of sleep to ride the two

REAL EX-

For details of our Real Experience

Night Horse



By WILL JAMES

hours' guard shift around and around the herd. Maybe it's on account of the many thoughts and dreams that comes to the mind at such times, by the quiet bedded herd and under starlit skies.

That would be a good setting for these modern cowboy songs, and there's many such nights. But there's also as many of the other kind, when the skies are cloudy and all is dark as stacks of black cats in dark caves, when hard-driven sleet and snow keeps the herd drifting, or with blinding lightning and roaring thunder and hurricane-like winds, or with cloudburst-like rains with hail pelting the hides of the restless cattle, to sometimes cause 'em to stampede.

Some night horses, if of quiet enough nature when colts, are started on the work of night guard right away after the first few saddlings and kept for that

work only. A horse that's good for that work is as important as a horse that's good for cow work, such as cutting out, roping, etc., and horses that's broke to night guard that way are usually mighty good at it, sometimes beyond human understanding.

Hippy was such a horse, and like with other such horses I've rode, he'd often make me wonder at his supernatural-like instinct or sixth sense. Like for instance; while holding half-wild herds during pitch dark nights when I could hardly see his ears and the herd would be quiet and still, some of the cattle getting mighty wise and tricky would watch a rider go by and then sneak out of the herd as quiet and careful as a cat could. Once out of hearing distance from the herd they would then go faster and faster until they safely made their get-away, when they would slow down to a steady drifting gait.

But not many would get away that way unless there wasn't enough riders for the size of the herd. For a good night

PERIENCES

story contest, see page 3.



There was no chance to go around it, so smack into that white blur we dived.

horse sure wouldn't let them if he was within hearing distance of 'em as they sneaked out. He'd take after 'em, and sometimes long before the rider could hear or see them during cloudy and real dark nights.

As I'd be riding Hippy during such nights, and relying on him so much I'd once in a while half doze in the saddle, and sometimes he'd near slip out from under me as with a sudden jerk he'd light into a tight run.

He'd be running from the herd, and like he was sure enough out to head off and turn some herd-quitters. I of course would let him go, even though in the darkness I couldn't see a thing ahead.

But soon enough I'd be hearing the clicking of the critters' hoofs, for by then, knowing they'd been discovered, they'd hit out at top speed and try to lose us in the dark.

But there'd be no losing Hippy, and soon enough he'd be alongside of the leader; then the bunch would be turned back to the herd. Seldom more than a few cattle at a time would try to sneak out that quiet way. These would be mostly old renegades, wise to all tricks, and had got away many times before, when all would be quiet and the whole herd still.

There was times when it was pitch dark that way and Hippy would of a

sudden bust out after some unseen herd-quitters that, riding alongside of 'em and getting to what I thought would be the leader I'd be for turning 'em back, but there'd be some such times when Hippy wouldn't turn, for there'd be another runaway bunch further on, which I couldn't see but which somehow he'd detected or got the wind of. I'd let him go, and sure enough, in a short time I'd hear the clatter of more running hoofs ahead.

Having good confidence in Hippy that way I'd leave it to him when come dark and stormy nights and I couldn't see very far. Where the renegades would run to when getting away from the herd would be towards the roughest of the surrounding country. Some of it would be rough enough for mountain goats, but Hippy fell only a couple of times with me during the three months I rode him on night guard for that outfit.

But an average bucking horse was easier to ride than Hippy when he'd hit out full speed and across rough country during them nights, for, in the pitch darkness, I couldn't tell for no distance ahead whether there'd be a sudden drop of some feet or a rise the same, or a jump or turn. I'd have to be doing some tall riding to stay in the saddle, for Hippy would take most any kind of country at the same speed and as though it was all level when he thought he was after stock that was trying to get away.

Sometimes I think his imagination got the best of him too, and he'd be mighty restless. But then, so would the herd be restless and, as I got to noticing, it would be mostly during such times when there'd be a stampede, maybe only a short scare, then again, there was some good ones too. Some of the stampedes sometimes broke loose after me and Hippy had been relieved of our shift, but I remembered that by Hippy's restlessness during our guard. He'd felt it coming.

SO that was the queer twist I found in Hippy, or maybe it was just his being over-alert. But sometimes, while we'd quietly and steady make our rounds of the herd at a walk he'd come to a stop, look and listen from some direction, sniff the air and then he'd start out, from a trot into a high lope. I couldn't see or hear anything, but knowing that with his developed senses and instinct I was no match for him at night, I'd let him go.

A few times it might of been only the crack of a twig or dry brush at a dis-

tance, and even though he'd most always wind up by running onto some herd-quitters there was times he'd line out that way when there wasn't anything, without scent nor sound to attract him. It would be just plain imagination or maybe he just wanted to have a run.

He did have some good chances to run during the few months I rode him, and when he didn't need to use his imagination for a reason. That was during some fair to middling to good long-winded stampedes. Hippy more than enjoyed 'em, so much, and would get so excited that he'd sometimes lose his head and stampeed too, go to running wild and paying no attention as to where he was going or running into. There'd be no turning or stopping him at such times.

THE best and scariest run he put on that way for me was during one of them long-winded stampedes. It was a dark and spooky night. The herd at that time was made up of over a thousand head of big beef steers, from four-year-olds on up to near the limit of any steer's age, for two-thirds of the herd was "Mexico buckskins" (Longhorns) and there was no telling the age of some of them, but one good long summer in the tall grass of the northern range and they got as fat as their frame could allow, also as wild.

We was trailing this mixed herd of native and Mexico beeves to the shipping point, grazing 'em along the way and taking 'em easy so they wouldn't lose any more weight than possible. On that account we all was mighty careful so they wouldn't even get a start to stampeding, for the hard running and then the gathering of 'em as they'd scatter afterwards would cause the loss of quite a few pounds per steer, and if the stampede was a long and fast one that would amount to a considerable loss when it come to over a thousand big steers.

All of us was doing our very best to see that no such would happen along the trail, with this herd, and all went well until we got the herd about to go; when, as we bedded the herd for that night, we noticed faint streaks of lightning away to the west and we picked out as big and level opening as we could find to hold the herd in. It wasn't a very big opening, for that country was pretty rough, but it would do if the cattle didn't get too restless or start to running.

The cook had set camp in a well-sheltered spot, close to a steep hill and well above the creek bank, but not under or



very near any trees, for, as he remarked, when we gathered for supper that evening, he didn't like these so-late-in-the-year thunderstorms.

"They're usually freakish," he said, "the wind is apt to twist and turn you inside out, and if the lightning don't get you a cloudburst most likely will."

It turned out that the cook was about halfway right in his prophecy. I was to be on "graveyard" shift that night. That guard is for the hours from midnight to two. But it was long before time for my shift when in the middle of what seemed to be a sure enough cloudburst, I and all the other riders off guard had to get out from under our tarps, jump on our horses and ride hard for the herd, wherever we thought it might be, for it had stampeded.

Every man was in the saddle, all but the cook and the day-wrangler, and they would of been riding too, only they of course never keep up night horses.

About eight of us rode on and circled quite a ways before we located the herd and some of the riders that was with it, and then it was only by the rumbling sound of the running hoofs splashing on muddy sod and the cracking of dry limbs as it went through scrub timber, that we did locate it. That was between thunder claps. The flashes of lightning didn't help much, for they being so close near blinded us and it was only all the darker afterwards. Not mentioning the heavy sheets of rain that felt like to pound us into the earth.

The herd had of course left the opening soon as they first stampeded. When they leave that way they just seem to

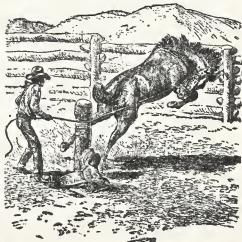
pick up and are gone, the whole herd as if one, and what riders are on shift have no chance to turn or hold 'em, for it usually happens too sudden.

By the time we got to the herd it was scattered pretty bad and a rider couldn't tell whether he was in the middle of it or on one side with only part of it, or even in the lead. For there was cattle everywhere, running all directions, and in that rough, scrub-timber country there was no use trying to get the herd together again, get 'em to milling and to stop. Not while that freak storm was raging.

WE done our best to find and keep on the outside of the scattering herd so they wouldn't scatter any more than was possible, but in that darkness, heavy rain and wind and blinding lightning we sometimes hardly knew where we was at. Our horses would slide down off slippery gumbo pinnacles and sidehills and right down amongst where some running cattle had piled up at the bottom. There was also the danger of more to come and sliding down, and a cowboy being jammed in at the bottom of a ravine or gully amongst hefty longhorns, was likely to be there permanent.

But the big husky steers wouldn't be in no such a jam for long at a time, and slipping and sliding and running into one another or trees and boulders, they kept on going fast as they could, to the end—which would be when they got over their fright or became exhausted and couldn't run no more.

It was while the stampede was at its best, fireworks going on all around, thunder roaring on and rain a pelting to the



weight of an ounce a drop, wind a tearing and all combined that me and Hippy slid onto a good-sized bunch which I figured had split from the main part of the herd, and then was sure hitting out of the country.

All of us riders was pretty well scattered by then, as scattered as the cattle was, and hardly any of us knew where the other was. That sure couldn't be helped in that weather and country at that time. But scattered as we was we still worked together and to the same aim, which was, without orders or instructions, to always try to hold the herd together. If that was impossible, such as during that night, to ride for the lead bunches and try to turn 'em towards where the main part of the herd might be thought to be or towards the bed-ground, where the herd had started from and was to be held for the night.

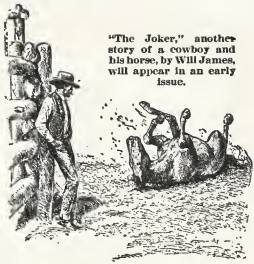
Figuring that the herd was so badly scattered and there was no main part to it I took to the lead of the big bunch I'd run onto. Hippy was all for that and slipped and slid 'em to turn after turn, running into bunch after bunch of more cattle, and cowboys all riding their best to turn each their bunches into a main one so's they'd be easier to hold. Me and Hippy was sure doing our share and sort of halfway enjoying the goings-on when another bunch, like dropping from the heavy skies, slid right into the middle of the bunch we was already having a tough time trying to handle.

Well, there was nothing to do but get to the lead of *that* bunch, and if there was any weakness in that knocked-in hip of Hippy's it sure didn't show on him as he raced on and caught up with the lead.

By a dimmer flash of lightning I seen the lead as we caught up to it and somehow managed to turn the bunch back. I was about to hold Hippy down for a breathing spell then, but that bunch was no more than turned when he went right on, like he'd sure heard of another bunch getting away. I let him go.

IT being so dark and stormy, having made so many turns and twists, down pinnacles and across flooded ravines and washes I couldn't judge for very far just where I might be riding, but I judged that I was somewhere between where we'd bedded the herd that evening and where camp was.

I didn't have much time to think of where I was right then, for Hippy had



"The Joker," another story of a cowboy and his horse, by Will James, will appear in an early issue.

stampeded, or was running away with his imagination that there was more cattle ahead, and I was about to try to stop and turn him back when I of a sudden felt like he was getting out from under me and slipping down into space. I just only tried to steady him from falling then and, as good luck would have it, we hit the bottom right side up, still a going full speed ahead. Then a tall white blur in the thick of the dark of a sudden stuck up in front of us, and at the speed we was going there was no chance to stop or go around it, and so right smack into that white blur we dived.

If it had been a stone wall it would of been the same. But there was a tearing sound of canvas, the breaking of a ridge pole, and at that instant I knew it was the cook tent. A flash of lightning at that same time made me see for double sure that it was.

It was again a miracle that Hippy and me didn't pile up when we hit that tent, but Hippy had tried to clear it and he hit it above center, and at the speed we was going the tent went down from under us, only bringing Hippy to his knees beyond it and to slide on them and his nose for a ways.

But he soon got his footing again and away he went some more, and I didn't try to stop him, not right then, for the cook who slept inside of that tent was mighty cranky at his best, just as handy with his shooting-iron, and I sure didn't want to linger and let it be known whether it was me on Hippy, some other rider, or a hurricane that leveled the tent that night.

Nobody knows to this day, but if any of the riders who was with the outfit at the time happens to read this they will remember, especially the cook will.



When the

By

JOHN E. BURNS

I WAS an oiler on the S.S. *Collingsworth* on September 17th, and spent two and a half hours out in a lifeboat helping pick up survivors from H.M.S. *Courageous*, the English airplane-carrier.

It happened in the evening; I was off watch at the time. I had the eight-to-twelve watch. The *Courageous* had been going up and down past us for several days, sometimes almost out of sight, and sometimes within two or three miles of us. She had passed us so many times that we had begun to feel a proprietary interest in her. And her speed was so much greater than ours that she would go some distance ahead of us, with her escort of four destroyers, then turn and come back, going far astern of us.

I was standing on deck watching planes land on her deck, when I wanted a cigarette, and went to my forecabin to get them. While I was there, the alarm-bells began to ring.

I knew it was not just a drill at that time on a Sunday evening, so I grabbed several packs of cigarettes, matches, my papers, and a life-preserver, and went on deck. Someone amidship yelled, "Boat stations!" so I went up on the boat-deck.

Even if everyone hadn't been talking about it, I would have known why after one look at the *Courageous*. In the few minutes I'd been off deck, she had been hit—and hit hard. Much of this I found out later, but she had been hit twice—once forward and once aft. The forward torpedo had exploded a magazine on the *Courageous*, tearing an enormous hole in her. She was nearly twenty-three thousand tons, and I don't think any ship anywhere near her size has ever gone down so fast—she was hit at 6:18 and was completely under at 6:25—seven minutes.

While approaching the spot where she sank, we were swinging out the No. 1 and No. 2 lifeboats, and rigging pilot ladders from the forward well-deck.

The Chief Mate called for volunteers, and five of us piled in the No. 1 boat: a wiper, an A. B., an Ordinary, a work-away (who had been an A. B. on the *American Banker* and missed it in London) and myself—an oiler—at the oars and the mate at the tiller.

Our captain had not dared go too close in to the spot where the *Courageous* sank, and the two destroyers were racing round and round dropping depth-charges, the shock of some of which we could feel on the *Collingsworth*. About four o'clock that afternoon a British merchantman had been sunk some forty miles from us, and two of the escort of four destroyers had been detached and sent to try to get that "sub," leaving only two to guard the *Courageous*.

It was dark before we picked up the first man. He was swimming alone; and a little distance away we could see two groups of men with fifteen or more in each group hanging on to some wreckage. Just then our No. 2 boat came up, and we called to them to keep to their port, which carried them directly to the two large groups.

We rowed farther into the area, picking up a man here and there. Several times we started for men, only to have them go under before we could reach them. Most of the time there were only three of us at the oars, and two men in the bow to pull in the castaways. Two men were needed for that job, as the swimmers were all exhausted when we reached them. The sea water was 58 degrees, and most of them had shed their clothes to rid themselves of extra weight.

ONE sad happening was when we headed for a group of three men, and one of them went down before we reached them. We got to the other two, and the two men in the bow grabbed them. They were just about all in. They put one

Courageous Sank

An American sailor who helped man one of the Collingsworth's lifeboats tells of his share in a historic tragedy.

fellow's hands on the gunwale on the port side, while they hauled the other fellow in on the starboard side. When they turned to get the man on the port side, he had let loose and gone under without a sound. We fished for him for a minute with boathooks, but didn't find him. We had to hold the one man we saved to keep him from jumping back. He told us the other fellow was his buddy and couldn't swim, and he had been holding him up all that time.

The fellow must have been a very good swimmer, for he was one of the few we picked up fully clothed,—he even had on a suede jacket,—and had been in the water over two hours when picked up.

Another fellow we picked up had nothing on except underwear shorts, and they were torn. The first thing he said was: "Blyme, I hope there's no lydies on your boat. I can't come aboard this way, you know."

One incident that scared us all happened when we had about ten or twelve men in the boat. As we pulled them in over the bow, they crawled or we lifted them into the after part of the boat, so we'd have room to work the oars. Then too, by huddling together in the bottom, they managed to keep a little warmer. Suddenly one of them called out for the flashlight, and said the plug was out of the boat. We could hear water gurgling, and I had visions of all of us being in the drink. We all laughed in relief when we found out what it was: one of them had knocked the bung out of the fresh-water keg.

In the meantime the destroyers, sure that they had got the sub, had come in closer and stopped. They didn't put over any boats until well over two hours after the sinking. Not that they didn't want to, but Naval regulations forbid rescue work until the safety of the remaining ships is assured. While remaining poised

for action, they saved many men who swam over to them and were pulled aboard by lines.

A Holland-American liner had also come up and launched four boats. There was a small English freighter too; and although I have not had any confirmation of this, I think she was one of the so-called Q-boats.

WE picked up fourteen men in our life-boat; only one of them had a life-preserver on. He was an officer, but whether of the ship or an aviator, I don't know. He was the hardest of them all to save. When we came near him, he seemed unconscious. We tried to pull him alongside the boat with an oar, and he grabbed it tighter than a drowning man is supposed to clutch a straw. The wiper and I pulled him in over the boat after we got him loose from the oar.

After we picked up the last fellow, we rowed around for some time but didn't see any more, and as we heard no more calls, we started back to the *Collingsworth*. On the way we were hailed by one of the destroyers, and asked to give them the survivors we had. It was quite a job. The sea wasn't really rough, but the swells were heavy, and a destroyer will roll in a millpond. One minute we'd be down looking at her keel, and the next we'd be looking down at her deck, and four of the men we had had to be hoisted aboard in slings. One man's mind was gone, either from shock or exposure. He was conscious but helpless. Two others had bad legs, and another seemed to be semi-paralyzed from a blow on the back.

When we got back to the *Collingsworth* we found our No. 2 boat had got back with thirty-eight men. Some of them were badly injured, and others had had miraculous escapes. Among them was one man who had been several decks beneath the water-level and had no idea

WHEN THE COURAGEOUS SANK

how he had got off. He must have been blown out of the ship's side, though he didn't have a scratch on him. The engineer commander was another. He had just showered, and was dressing for dinner when he was blown off the ship. He was dressed in two garters and one sock.

When I got back aboard at nearly ninety-three I was of course late going on watch. I filled up on coffee, had a quick shower, and took over from the four-to-eight oiler. As we were just drifting, I spent some time on deck talking to some of the *Courageous* men. They told us the same story some of the men we picked up had while we were in the boat. They said planes from the *Courageous* had sunk three subs that day. They all said that the British Navy knew how many subs were in the Atlantic and North Sea at the time war was declared, and that they had sunk nearly four-fifths of them.

I think they knew what they were talking about, because the reports of ship sinkings bear out their story. The Germans claim now the sub got away, but for several reasons I feel sure it didn't. One is that the commander of the second destroyer told us, while he was taking the survivors off the *Collingsworth*, that they had got it. Then too, it was eighteen hours or so after the sinking before the British radio announced it, and twelve hours after that before the German radio announced it. If that sub had got away, they would have wirelessly the news to Germany, for that was the first British Navy ship sunk in the war, and an airplane-carrier at that. The Germans would have been only too happy to announce it before the British did.

SINCE I wrote this story, I met the captain of the *Collingsworth*. When we got back, he was transferred to another ship and went right back across.

He told me several things that I hadn't known before. One was the exact location. But the Admiralty had asked him not to reveal it; so while I don't think it makes any difference now, I won't give the latitude and longitude, but it was about two hundred and fifty miles west of Land's End. Also he felt certain, as I did, that the small British freighter was a Q-boat, used to trap subs. And he told me that the Holland-American liner which came on the scene later had only picked up one man with their four boats, and that man later died; while we got fifty-two men in two boats, all of whom survived.



THIS is a true story; it happened to me in 1936, just as I have recorded it, when I was sent out on a special mission into Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia, to carry out an investigation into the causes of the tribal fighting which had occurred there intermittently for some years, and to establish friendly relations among the warring factions.

From the natives' point of view it is easily explained, and in fact quite natural and satisfactory. But it leaves the white man without any adequate reply. Of course, you may call it just coincidence. . . .

"It's all a lot of rot," the missionary was saying in the superior tone that he assumed when speaking of native custom. "These tabus don't mean anything, and the sooner we can get rid of these silly old-fashioned ideas, the quicker we can civilize them."

Our arguments on native customs generally ended that way. We were speaking of "tabus" at the time. He was anxious to make a clean sweep of the lot; I, on my side, was insisting on their functional use in the native society. For, to put it crudely, "tabu" is, to most primitive peoples, practically synonymous with the police force in a civilized community. It furnishes the means by which law and order can be enforced.

"Anyway," the missionary continued, anxious to push home the point, "these wretched superstitions are meaningless. Things like this never happen in real life, and the people don't believe in them; they are just victims of their medicine-men."

There was a time when I might have agreed with him—at least in part; but that was before I had lived with the natives as one of themselves, learned to

“Mirriri”

A weird happening in native Australia.

By DONALD F. THOMSON

Speak their language, and incidentally, seen things happen that cannot be explained under the white man's philosophy—things that take some laughing off.

It was part of my job, at the time, to keep the peace in a tract of uncontrolled country some twenty thousand square miles in extent, and to make a study of native lore and custom. I was working just then on genealogies—collecting pedigrees for a study of kinship; and that afternoon we were going against time, to finish off the investigation of a relationship system, before leaving on an inland patrol.

No Arnhem Land native may ever speak the name of his sister; nor may he hear it spoken in front of him. Of that I had long been aware. This is *mirriri*—an offence so grave that it is punished by supernatural visitation. As a rule the difficulty is averted, in collecting pedigrees, quite simply. Since everyone is aware of the tabu, whenever the name of a sister or other tabu relation crops up, the informant will call a bystander who is not prohibited from pronouncing the name, to speak it for him, and danger is averted. But on this occasion there was nobody about who stood in an appropriate relationship; none who could be summoned to speak the forbidden name.

Raiwalla, my own personal boy—and incidentally, my tribal “younger brother” and instructor in matters of etiquette—looked around uneasily. “By and by snake bite you and me,” he declared. Then suddenly he seemed to change his mind. Glancing round again to make sure that nobody was about, he spoke the name in a low whisper. I thought no more of the incident, and that same afternoon we set out on a patrol, the first stage of a journey of three hundred miles on foot, with native carriers.

It was heavy going, and for hours we climbed a low range of rugged hills, descending on the other side. It was just dusk as we camped, close by a creek. Tired after the hard traveling, I unrolled my swag and lay at full length on the canvas, my bare legs stretched out in front of me. All around were the little fires of the carriers, busy cooking their evening meals.

All at once I became aware of a peculiar sensation in my left leg—as if something deadly and unnaturally cold had touched me. I propped myself on my elbow and looked down to investigate. In the half light—it was nearly dark by this time—I could just make out the body of a snake, elongated as it stretched to cross my leg. I could see dimly the broad flat head, and the body, marked with transverse bands. I thought at once of the only nocturnal snake in this region which had such distinctive markings—the brown tree snake (*Boiga fusca*). I remembered that it was only slightly venomous—one of the “back-fanged” snakes, a group of snakes which have the poison-fangs far back in the mouth and are therefore at a disadvantage in biting. In the previous year I had secured a single specimen of this beautiful reptile on the Roper River to the south, and I was very anxious to secure another. All these things I thought, as I identified the snake. I realized that the least movement on my part would alarm it, and I kept perfectly still, for I did not wish to lose the specimen.

Slowly, without haste or alarm, the snake crossed the intervening space between my legs, nosed against my right leg, and then began slowly to cross it. Even as I watched its leisurely progress and felt again the chill of its scaly body, I repressed a desire to move my leg and

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kick the reptile off. But knowing that this would mean the loss of the coveted specimen, I fought it down.

When at length it had crossed the second leg, I called to one of the natives to bring a fish-spear, so that I could pin down the snake without injuring it. This was accomplished without difficulty, and it was secured. Then the boys brought torches and flares of bark. As the light fell on the reptile, I saw the broad, flattened, evil-looking viperine head, and the short, thick body, not of a brown tree snake, but of a death adder! The death adder (*Acanthophis antarctica*), is one of the deadliest, and certainly the quickest in action, of all Australian snakes. And though I was especially interested in snakes, and collected more than three hundred in this area in two years, *this was the only specimen of the death adder that I encountered in all that time.*

Just then Raiwalla came up. He looked at the snake, and spat with an emphasis that spoke volumes.

"I been talk first time," he remarked. "By and by snake come." I don't know if there is a word for coincidence in Raiwalla's language, and I have never summoned the courage to ask.

I looked again at the reptile and realized that probably nothing but my mistake in identification—which led me to keep perfectly still—had saved my life. The mistake was understandable, for both snakes have broad heads, and although the death adder is normally short and thick, with transverse color-bands not well defined in repose, when it stretches out in movement, the color-bands can be clearly seen.

To the natives, of course, there was nothing at all remarkable about the incident—unless it was the fact that the snake did not bite. They know that the punishment for "mirriri" is death.

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